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Box of Tricks: A Critical Analysis of Twenty- First Century Televised Performance Magic

by

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university. Chapter 3, “‘Real or magic?’: entertainment, enchantment, and the everyday in the works of David Blaine”, contains revised material that was published in an article authored solely by me entitled “‘I Am Alive in Here’: Liveness, Mediation, and the Staged Real of David Blaine’s Body’ in the *Journal of Performance Magic*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2016. The article was published under a Creative Commons licence, so the work is included on this basis. In-text citations indicate where material from this article has been incorporated, and a full bibliographic entry including DOI can be found in the ‘Works Cited’ section.

Abstract

This thesis critically analyses twenty-first century televised performance magic, asking what aspects of its theatrical past practitioners have retained, and how they have used televisual elements in their work. It contributes to the field of theatre and performance by attending to the multiplicity of media within this underexplored genre of performance, analysing case study episodes starring magicians who have found success in Britain, namely David Blaine, Dynamo (Steven Frayne), and Derren Brown. This thesis builds on the work of scholars within theatre and performance and a range of cognate disciplines who have demonstrated the significance of technologically mediated elements in performance magic. It ultimately argues televised magic has generated its own discourses of reality and fiction, as remediated texts that are ambiguous about their fictional and real elements, and that further entwine notions of enchantment within everyday life. Blaine's 'street magic' shows and endurance stunts attempt to establish the reality of their spectacle, addressing both on-screen spectators and a community of viewers who are separated from the effects temporally and spatially, while remaining attached to notions of 'live' performance. The series *Magician Impossible*, starring Dynamo and influenced by Blaine's work, draws on discourses of reality and fiction from a variety of popular media genres to test the boundaries between these two categories. Brown's work more consciously refers to historical traditions of performance magic, producing hybrid texts that establish links to the past within the mediatized context of the present. The case studies considered in this thesis possess the potential for a range of engagements that include both belief and scepticism, adapting performance magic to astonish audiences in the twenty-first century.

1. Introduction: performance magic on television

Magician, historian, and erstwhile President of the American Society of Magicians, Milbourne Christopher, begins his *Illustrated History of Magic* (1975) with the Westcar papyrus, evidence of 'the first known royal command conjuring performance' (8) dating from approximately 1700 BC, and ends with chronicling televised appearances by magicians from the 1950s to the 1970s. One such event is a performance given on 09 April 1956 by the Bengali magician Protul Chandra Sorcar, performing on the BBC's *Panorama* the evening before his opening night at the Duke of York's Theatre in London (405). The performance included a variation on the 'Sawing through a Woman' effect with assistant Dipty Dey. Christopher describes what happened next:

To prove the cut was not an optical illusion, [Sorcar] thrust a wide metal cleaver down through the incision. Then he pulled away the blade, rubbed the girl's hands, and told her to wake up. She remained stiff and motionless. As the program was running overtime, host Richard Dimbleby broke in to say good night. Then the telephones began to ring. For more than an hour the switchboard at Lime Groves studio was jammed. Protesting viewers thought the girl had been murdered... Front-page stories the next day reported: "TRICK ALARMS VIEWERS"; "SAWING SORCAR ALARMS VIEWERS"; "GIRL CUT IN HALF—SHOCK ON TV"; "SAWN-UP WOMAN—TV PANIC"... (405-6)

The effect had become a classic image of performance magic by this time, created by P. T. Selbit and first performed in 1921 to an audience at the Finsbury Park Empire (Steinmeyer 281). In Christopher's account, the live broadcast could not be permitted to overrun, and these temporal constraints caused the finale to be cut, causing some viewers to believe that they had witnessed a gory accident on screen. They knew that Sorcar performed illusions, and that what they were witnessing was a magic effect. Despite this knowledge, it seems that some still believed that the spectacle of Dey's mutilation was real.

How to read this incident, that apparently profoundly disrupted viewers' ability to discern between fiction and reality? Perhaps the response by the older media form of print journalism to the newer form of television contained some elements of illusion. It resembles the hysteria reputed to have been caused by the 1938 radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*,¹ which opens

¹ The radio adaptation of H. G. Wells' novel was directed by Orson Welles and produced by the Mercury Theatre. It took the form of a fictional emergency broadcast announcing the arrival of

the question as to how much of this 'panic' might really have been experienced by viewers, and the degree to which it may have been exaggerated by mass media outlets. Jeffrey Sconce notes that *The War of the Worlds* 'stands even today as a common reference point for critics who wish to invoke a parable of the media's awesome power over its audiences' (111), the discourse surrounding the event contributing to a pervasive mythology regarding the efficacy of media effects. Another perspective might note that as a Bengali performing in the former epicentre of the British Empire, Sorcar's routine occurs in a context in which 'colonial exploitation is justified by representing foreign, magic-believing cultures as less rational than "scientific" culture' (Stibbe 421). It is conceivable that Sorcar's subaltern identity may have lead viewers to imagine him as a hapless bungler or even as a more malevolent agent, conflating his performance magic with 'irrational' cultural practices that might be imagined to include human sacrifice. Yet another key element in reading this event, in which fiction and reality seemed to collapse into each other, is in the differences between the theatrical conventions that provided the original conditions for the staging of the 'Sawing', and the new media form of television. Had the effect taken place upon a stage, with a co-present audience sharing the same space and time as the performer, there would presumably have been no call for such an abortive finale. But since the 'Sawing' was developed to work under these circumstances, there would have been little room to work with the contingencies and constraints of live television to improvise an ending that resolved the effect. At this historical moment, all television programming was 'discursively "live" by virtue of its instantaneous transmission and reception', and arguably residual conceptualisations of its 'living' quality still persist (Sconce 2). For Sconce, much of our thinking about television and other electronic media is structured by the uncannily 'live', sentient presence of such media, which seem to represent 'spectral worlds', 'creating virtual beings that appear to have no physical form' (4). These inherently illusionistic qualities mean that events represented on television are of a different order than those we perceive to be unmediated. The 'Sawing' was magic decontextualised from its original performance circumstances, transposed into the uncannily familiar yet poorly understood medium of television. It might be argued that this media

Martians on Earth, and narrating their subsequent tyranny of the planet. The use of a factual format to tell the story reportedly caused mass confusion over the broadcast's reality status. Jeffrey Sconce notes 'newspapers reported that thousands of listeners had taken the performance as fact and that a nationwide "panic" had ensued. Everything from heart attacks to car wrecks to suicide attempts were blamed on the broadcast' (110). However, Sconce argues that '[d]irect evidence that thousands of Americans were in an actual panic over the broadcast is... limited at best' (115-6).

intervention unsettled the effect's status as fiction, moving the event towards a more uncertain territory where fiction and reality became less easy to discern.

At the same time, Christopher's analysis suggests that at the time of writing, televised performance magic largely observed the same conventions as that which was performed 'live'. Sorcar's 'Sawing' and other 'televised magic spectacles' discussed by Christopher include appearances with 'variety show hosts' like Milton Bearle and Ed Sullivan, wherein magicians 'played a flute and coaxed an imitation cobra to find a selected card... produced live chicks from empty cups- and the trouser legs of volunteers... escaped from a locked safe... [and] duplicated- though heavily blindfolded- words written on a blackboard by spectators' (427). These acts of transformation, manipulation of objects, and mental magic were all but identical with the vaudeville acts that had preceded them, even reproducing similar forms of participation from a studio audience as would have been solicited from those in a theatre. Moreover, it seems that televised magic at this time was imagined by magicians primarily in relation to a 'live' mode of performance, either as supplanting or enlivening their careers. According to Christopher, the advent of television provoked a range of responses among magicians: 'some feared that once small-screen viewers saw their acts, few people would pay to watch them in the flesh. Others believed television appearances would enhance their box-office appeal' (426). That television might eventually produce its own forms and styles of performance magic is not mentioned amongst Christopher's hopes and concerns for the future of the practice, nor those of his colleagues.

Yet, in the intervening years between the broadcast of Sorcar's 'Sawing' in the 1950s and the period with which this study is concerned, the late 1990s to present day, modes of television developed which would come to influence televised performance magic. John Corner notes that several distinct strands of innovation in television documentary had emerged by the mid-1990s, which are '[t]he use of dramatic reconstruction and vérité material in multi-item programmes about emergency services', '[t]he emergence of the "do-it-yourself" documentary shot on camcorder', and '[t]he use of hidden micro-cameras in order to obtain footage by disguise' (182). These three strands 'all represent the movement towards new kinds of "raw" depiction' (187), contributing to a new mode of realism. However, Corner also argues for the emergence of another documentary mode at this time, one more committed to 'elaborated, self-consciously aesthetic devices', drawing from narrative fiction as well as 'the new forms of publicity and music television' (188). According to Corner, these types of stylised, intertextual documentary text, that '[invite]

the viewer to consider its own mediations', often lack a general appeal to a popular audience that limits their usefulness as 'public communication' (188). His key example is the 'enhanced naturalism' (143) of *When the Dog Bites* (1988), which works to produce an 'exotic' portrayal of the north-eastern English town Consett, grounded in 'a version of documentary naturalism' in a way that displaces and subverts the language of the 'naturalistic image... without any substantial de-referentialising of the account' (142). This representational strategy risks "'losing" the viewer by employing cultural codes that are not widely accessible', and 'stressing the authorial over the evidential to the point where "documentary" status is not attributed by viewers' (142). The divergence of the stylistic strategies of the modes that Corner discusses, the new realism concerned with 'raw depiction' and the aestheticised 'enhanced naturalism', may indeed cause issues for documentary as a category of factual programming. Jon Dovey more bluntly identifies documentary's ontological claim to truth as increasingly thrown 'out of the window' by the turn of the millennium (11). Writing in 2000, Dovey argues that factual television's "'regime of truth" at the turn of the millennium has some qualities surprisingly in common with the vaudeville, fairground and peepshow context of a hundred years ago', namely that the production of 'truth' is 'likely to involve fakery, manipulation and distortion' in a 'cultural ecology' that is concerned with 'pleasure, and therefore desire' (7). This strain of factual television has perhaps found an expression in the notion of 'reality television', which will be a key site of critical engagement throughout this thesis. However, the rupture between representation and truth that concerns Dovey arguably contributed to an environment in which televised performance magic could fully exploit the heady mix of elements that Corner identifies in his discussion, of DIY media, vérité material, hidden camera footage, intertextuality, and a foregrounding of mediation. The availability of these newer styles and regimes in factual television offered a plethora of creative possibilities for forms like performance magic, 'one which challenges the spectator's sense of reality' (Mangan xv).

This thesis thus asks: what does televised magic look like in the twenty-first century? What aspects of its theatrical past have practitioners retained, and what kinds of televisual affordances have they embraced? The following study analyses a range of works produced by the magicians David Blaine, Steven Frayne alias Dynamo, and Derren Brown, whose performances are primarily disseminated through television. These roughly contemporaneous case studies were selected not because they are necessarily entirely representative of televised magic, but because their work is characterised by the hybridity of televisual and live performance conventions, albeit

to different degrees and with different results. Dovey's association of factual television at the turn of the millennium with the bygone pleasures of the fairground seems especially apt given these concerns. Taking a broad, inclusive notion of 'text' to include audio-visual forms, this study discusses the textual strategies and influences at play in contemporary televised magic, the forms of engagement made possible, and the readings they invite in the context of twenty-first century culture.

In *Performing Dark Arts: A Cultural History of Conjuring* (2007) Michael Mangan writes of 'certain unique problems' presented by historical writing on performance magic (xvii). These include 'the central problem of the ephemeral nature of performance', which cause the researcher of any genre of historical performance to rely upon documentation of 'variable reliability' (xvii), and the understandable secrecy surrounding a form that trades upon illusion and deception (xix). With this in mind, a range of methodologies were considered to enhance this primary approach of case study analysis, including a programme of practice that could have involved the author learning magic and writing as an apprentice to the art, as undertaken by Graham M. Jones to research the Parisian magic 'community of practice' as subculture. Jones' method delivers fascinating ethnographic insights while carefully negotiating the value of secrecy and skill to the community. I take a different tack, feeling that for this work with its emphasis on performance forms it was not necessary to attempt to situate myself as an authority with special insider knowledge. As has been discussed in this section, the work of interpreting and explaining technique to lay audiences is already being done by magicians themselves both and outside the academy. Instead, I embrace my status as an outsider and position myself in this study as a spectator, a consumer of televised magic and popular media in general, in order to produce an analysis of form and meaning rather than technique and strategy. Another mixed methodological approach considered was directly soliciting audience views and feedback from the texts such as could be obtained from focus groups or viewing sessions. An established media studies methodology, Anette Hill and Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood are among the researchers cited in this thesis who have used such an approach to understand how audiences relate and react to television. As valuable as this would have been, the texts themselves proved such a rich vein for analysis that incorporating this tool would have risked overstretching the scope of this thesis and leaving its core concerns underdeveloped. With some reluctance, audience research has therefore been consigned to a future project that could build upon the current study.

An advantage of focusing upon televised performance magic is that the 'performances' to be analysed continue to be available in the present moment as full media texts rather than fragments of memory or memorabilia. The advent of digital and on-demand video ensures that these texts are freely accessible in the forms in which they were first made public, with minimal need for the imaginative reconstruction that Mangan identifies as a challenge for the performance historian (xvii). As will be discussed in the following sections, the aim of this thesis is not to produce a history that uncovers the secrets of magicians, but rather to read these texts in the context in which they were produced, respecting the desire among practitioners for secrecy concerning methods and techniques. Mangan's discussion demonstrates the need to be sensitive to the specific challenges of researching performance magic, and this introduction will discuss this context to justify choices made regarding literature and methodology.

The remainder of this introduction outlines the parameters of existing research on performance magic, drawing together material produced across disciplines to understand how the genre has been analysed already. Section 1.1 explores the issues arising from researching magic as a form, in terms of research objectives and the use of existing perspectives, and suggests how reading case studies closely can offer new insights. Section 1.2 will more directly consider how existing research has been guided by assumptions that performance magic requires the audience to be co-present in the same space and time as the performer, a condition generally understood as 'live' performance by theatre and performance scholars such as Philip Auslander. In the first edition of his work *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999), Auslander argues that the concepts of 'liveness' and 'mediatization' themselves are inherently relational, one term lacking in meaning without the other, such that liveness is always already conceptually embedded in notions of media. Auslander poses the possibility that 'mediatization' has eroded the aura of performance, its 'special attraction', to the extent that there is no longer a meaningful difference between live and non-live performance:

Following Benjamin, I might argue that live performance has indeed been pried from its shell and that all performance modes, live or mediatized, are now equal: none is perceived as auratic or authentic, the live performance is just one more reproduction of a given text or one more reproducible text. (*Liveness* 50)

In later work, Auslander revises his understanding of liveness to incorporate an analysis of the role that digital media plays in culture, arguing that in interacting with a technological artefact:

liveness is neither a characteristic of the object nor an effect caused by some aspect of the object such as its medium, ability to respond in real time, or anthropomorphism. Rather, liveness is an interaction produced through our engagement with the object and our willingness to accept its claim. ('Digital Liveness' 9)

This revised interpretation foregrounds 'interaction', 'engagement', and 'willingness' as key to producing liveness, readjusting the concept to reflect the intimate ways in which media affects the lives of its users in the twenty-first century. As shall be discussed, the term 'liveness' is used in a similar way to this revised sense in critical television studies, to denote a sense of spontaneity, authenticity, presence, and immediacy produced across a screen. Of course, 'live' is also a technical term that describes simulcast television and other types of broadcast that are simultaneously recorded and transmitted in 'real time'. Given this complexity in meaning, this thesis refers to 'live' performance in Auslander's sense by indicating it is a co-present encounter where performers and audience are sharing the same material space and time. The primary way in which the term 'liveness' is used in this thesis is to refer to televised works that attempt to convey spontaneity, authenticity, presence, and immediacy across a screen, while simulcast television will be described as 'live broadcast'. Lamont and Wiseman's *Magic in Theory: An Introduction to the Theoretical and Psychological Elements of Conjuring* (1999) and Landman's 'Framing Performance Magic: The Role of Contract, Discourse and Effect' (2013), two works that aim to describe and categorise what magic is and what magicians do, both include an assumption that magic is inherently a form that necessitates a co-present 'live' encounter, and this assumption and its implications are examined in this section. Section 1.3 comprises a discussion of the growing number of interventions that have recognised the issues with this perspective, arguing that just as performance magic braids with early film, so too does it become entangled in contemporary television. Finally, section 1.4 summarises the overall structure of the thesis.

Before proceeding with these objectives, though, the meaning of the term 'magic' in this context requires some further attention. 'Magic' in this study refers to performance magic following Todd Landman's definition, that is, 'any form of intentional deception through any means to create the appearance of inexplicable phenomena for entertainment purposes' (47). The elements of 'deception', 'appearance', and 'entertainment' place magic precisely and deliberately in the realm of fiction. Landman's definition is careful to exclude the notion of magic as a practice that harnesses supernatural forces, but perhaps inevitably summons this association. According to Simon During, the type of magic described by Landman appears to produce

supernatural events but uses methods that do not violate natural laws, and is therefore 'secular' (1). For During, 'secular' magic is distinct from, though twinned with, the kind that might be identified as 'witchcraft', that seeks to change the natural world using supernatural means (1). He argues that 'secular' magic has been overlooked because it is 'apparently trivial' but this apparent triviality, enabling it to sit alongside a range of belief systems without threatening them, 'leads to both its endurance and transportability' as it requires 'few cultural competencies to enjoy' (2). As such, 'secular' magic has been a powerful agent in the formation of 'a globalized culture', marked by 'illusions understood as illusions' (During 2). At the same time, 'entertainment-and-fiction magic refers back to its "real" double even when departing from it, so that the logic of "secular" magic is describable only in relation to a magic with supernatural purpose' (During 3). 'Secular' or performance magic always calls upon 'supernatural' magic to the point that one inevitably carries associations of the other. This reciprocity can be seen in the example of Landman's definition and potentially in Sorcar's 'Sawing'. The conceptual proximity of 'real' supernatural magic and 'fictional' performance magic means they are constantly in danger of collapsing into each other, and this enquiry is specifically focused upon the 'fictional' popular entertainment form and performance practice while keeping the tension between these two terms alive. The productivity of this tension is evident, for example, in the discussion that opens the following section.

1.1 Some considerations on researching performance magic: literature and methodology

'The first a student of magic learns is that there are books *about* magic, and books *of* magic' (13, emphasis in original), according to the narrator of Susanna Clarke's novel *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* (2004). How to distinguish the two? 'The principle... is that a book of magic should be written by a practising magician, rather than a theoretical magician or a historian of magic. What could be more reasonable? And yet we are already in difficulties' (14). Though written of a fictional eighteenth century England, and of the kind of magic that possesses 'supernatural purpose' (During 3), the narrator's formulation highlights a primary consideration in studying performance magic in the twenty-first century; namely, that alongside the growing body of academic research on the topic ('books *about* magic'), sits a vast amount of practical, instructional literature on how to perform magic ('books *of* magic').

The term ‘books of magic’ should perhaps be expanded in this context to encompass journals, online videos, DVDs, and self-published e-books, as well as those disseminated through traditional publishing methods, for such is the variety of texts used to communicate knowledge among magicians at present.² A few of the many prolific and respected authors of ‘books of magic’ include S.W. Erdnase (*The Expert at the Card Table*, 1902), Sam Sharpe (*Magic Artistry*, 1938), Dariel Fitzkee (*Misdirection for Magicians*, 1935), Darwin Ortiz (*Strong Magic*, 1995), and Lewis Ganson (*The Essential Dai Vernon*, 2009). This canon may be so prodigious because of the highly controlled way in which knowledge and expertise is transferred amongst magicians. As Graham M. Jones observes, the practice of ‘publishing’ one’s material, whether it appears as a book, periodical, DVD or any other form, constitutes an investment in ‘symbolic capital, as extensions of an inventor’s reputation’ (*Trade of the Tricks* 84). As a result of the imperative to ‘publish’ to consolidate one’s own image as well as to contribute to the development of magic, this body of knowledge changes constantly, as new methods and effects are developed. By contrast, ‘books about magic’ may be written by researchers whose methods are not primarily driven by a commitment to practice as magicians, such as During and Mangan. The present study also falls into this category. These interventions are framed according to the conventions of history, literature, performance, film, television, and other studies of cultural practice, using the tools and paradigms of their disciplines to read performance magic in its contexts, reaching new conclusions about its significance and significations. The category of ‘books about magic’ may also include those intended for a much wider, public readership, like Jim Steinmeyer’s works on the history of performance magic (*Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible*, 2003; *The Glorious Deception: The Double Life of William Robinson, Aka Chung Ling Soo, the “Marvelous Chinese Conjurer”*, 2005; *The Last Greatest Magician in the World: Howard Thurston Versus Houdini & the Battles of the American Wizards*, 2011).

And yet, like the narrator of Clarke’s novel, we are already in difficulties. Magicians including Max Maven (*Max Maven’s Book of Fortunetelling*, 1992), Eugene Burger and Robert E. Neale (*Magic and Meaning*, 1995), and Mariano Tomatis (editor of *The Ghost-Seer* with Fabio Camilletti, 2017) have discussed the history, meaning, and cultural significance of magic in their

² On 4 July 2017, a search of Amazon.co.uk using the terms ‘magic books’ found 4,013 results under the ‘Sports, Hobbies, and Games’ tab, while searching YouTube for the terms ‘how to do magic tricks’ yielded around 57.5 million results. Meanwhile, the magic retailer Vanishing Inc. listed 579 books and 841 DVDs for purchase on their UK website. Perhaps, amid this sea of content, there is a role for specialist outlets in curating and performing quality control.

works. Their instructional texts are important sites for intellectual enquiry, containing theoretical essays touching upon elements such as showmanship, the creation of drama, and the social function of magic. The works of these and other authors have been crucial in developing an understanding of the fundamentals of what magic is and does, and what it potentially *could* be and do. Additionally, 'books *about* magic' can be written by magicians drawing upon their own experiences and embodied knowledge. Much of the literature discussed in this introduction belongs in this category, including works by Todd Landman, Nik Taylor, Stuart Nolan, Peter Lamont, and Richard Wiseman. Less commonly, researchers may also undertake a programme of practice in order to carry out fieldwork, such as Graham M. Jones. The boundaries proposed by Clarke's narrator between '*of*' and '*about*' magic, or perhaps practice and theory, do indeed seem uncertain. Perhaps this is to be expected when discussing a practice that has been characterised by Mangan as performing 'boundary work', that is, 'bringing [spectators] up against their own assumptions of how the world works' (xv), and by Max Maven as 'the aesthetic exploration of mystery' (qtd. in Tomatis).

This study approaches the existing literature by determining which knowledge-seeking communities the texts address. The literature selected to frame this study may be authored by practising magicians but is almost always written for the purposes of research, and to reach an academic or more general readership. This is not because texts written to aid practising magicians in developing and improving their craft or to build practitioners' presence within the conjuring community are irrelevant to the research questions. Rather, this method of selection is a deliberate constraint, in the hope that focusing on research will give depth to the following study rather than the shallow and broad introduction that would no doubt result from a survey of all literature written for magicians within a given period. Focusing on research literature in this introduction will help to establish that the primary aim of this study is not to uncover *how* magic is performed, the secrets behind the miracles, but instead to continue the strand of enquiry that seeks to understand magic's appeal, influence, and relation to other forms across a variety of cultural, historical, and political contexts. What follows in this chapter is by no means an exhaustive discussion of all research literature on magic, but rather an attempt to interrogate selected works with regard to issues that inform the rest of this study.

As well as separating out the research literature from theoretical works written for magicians, a further research issue is the debate over what may be gained from academic research concerning magic. The project of developing a 'theory' of magic has long been supported

by magicians themselves. For example, *Our Magic*, published in 1911 by Nevil Maskelyne (son of John Nevil Maskelyne, a titan of Victorian London's magic scene and founder of the so-called 'England's Home of Mystery' at the Egyptian Hall in London) and David Devant (Maskelyne senior's business partner),³ argues that a 'theory' of magic, made widely available to the public, would be of overall benefit to the profession.

So far from feeling any reluctance towards letting the general public into the secrets of our procedure, we are most anxious to educate the public in such matters, in order that a proper understanding of our art may be disseminated among its votaries and patrons... An audience of magical experts is bound to see the performer's feats in a proper light. Such an audience will very seldom be perplexed by what is exhibited, and will never attach great importance to know "how it is done". Every member of such an audience will have his mind engrossed, almost exclusively, in noting the art with which the performer uses devices, known or unknown, to produce an intended effect. (vi-vii)

This passage reveals a desire to raise the public's consciousness of the nature of magicians' expertise, arguing that a magician's skill is best appreciated by an audience aware of the level of artistry, ingenuity, and technical difficulty of the effects. The spectatorial practice that Devant and Maskelyne wish to inculcate includes a critical engagement with method, rather than passive wonderment at how effects are achieved. They propose giving up secret knowledge for the overall benefit of the public, and for magicians themselves. Devant and Maskelyne's book stresses the importance of establishing an over-arching theoretical framework, transferring secret, embodied knowledge and expertise to a textual, accessible form. The debate between psychologists Gustav Kuhn and Ronald A. Rensink, and psychologist and practising magician Peter Lamont, is driven by similar concerns. Ultimately, their discussion seems to be about where the value in the relationship between science and magic is situated.

In a paper that appeared in 2008 in the journal *Trends in Cognitive Science*, Kuhn and Rensink advocate constructing a 'science of magic', a kind of Theory of Everything in which magicians' knowledge can be 'systematized' and 'which would explain all known magic effects in terms of known perceptual and cognitive mechanisms' ('Towards a Science of Magic' 349; 353). They emphasize the potential benefits to science and performance magic practice in their work,

³ See Steinmeyer 2003, chapter 5 for a fuller discussion on John Nevil Maskelyne's influence on British magic and his partnership with Devant.

in a manner that Maskelyne and Devant surely would have applauded, proposing that the acid test of 'a science of magic' should be the 'extent to which it can uncover new knowledge and produce interesting new effects' ('The Possibility of a Science of Magic' n.p.). The idea of a 'science of magic' is developed in a later paper as an overarching 'framework' to link together the disparate nodes of scientific research that take magic as their topic, the first step towards which is creating an inventory of effects ('A Framework for Using Magic to Study the Mind' n.p.). This perhaps reflects Durning's proposition that performance magic is imagined to be light and trivial, with the authors attempting to rescue magic from this trivial state by finding strategies to render it an object of serious scientific enquiry. Essentially, Rensink and Kuhn's arguments appear to rely on the paradigm of secrecy within magic, that a hoard of secret knowledge must be made visible within certain (clinical) parameters in order to be properly socially useful.

Lamont, too, is concerned with the epistemic potential of performance magic; not the exposure of secrets, as such, but the misapplication and misunderstanding of an already existing corpus of knowledge. While he does not contest the idea of magic as a potentially useful tool to scientists, he expresses several concerns with conceptualizing magic as a 'science', repeatedly calling the notion of a science of magic 'misguided' ('Where Science and Magic Meet' 16; 'Problems with the Mapping of Magic Tricks' 1). He denies that a science of magic would benefit magicians, since 'the vast majority of psychological writings [on magic] to date have been based almost entirely on what conjurors have written themselves' and 'magicians have always displayed ample competence in drawing on scientific knowledge when necessary to create new types of misdirection and to improve methods' ('Where Science and Magic Meet' 17). For Lamont, the types of knowledge that Rensink and Kuhn want to create already exist, but are overlooked, and it is unclear how their approach would enhance 'an understanding of the relationships between effects and methods' ('Problems with the Mapping of Magic Tricks' 1). Instead, Lamont suggests 'why not simply use magic to investigate perception, memory and reasoning?', as 'we do not need a taxonomy of misdirection, or of magic tricks, to do this' ('Problems with the Mapping of Magic Tricks' 3). Rather than use psychology to investigate magic as an object of study, Lamont advocates using magic as a tool for scientific enquiry into psychological phenomena; 'however', he observes, 'that is not a science of magic; it is science' ('Where Science and Magic Meet' 20). This discussion about methods and purpose is significant because it further emphasises the conceptual flexibility of magic. Like performance itself, magic can be considered both a field and a method of enquiry, an object to be understood and a way of gaining understanding.

This thesis is not an attempt to quantify magic's value, as undertaken by Rensink, Kuhn, and Lamont. As During has argued, it is already apparent through the form's longevity and geographical spread that it possesses cultural significance. Neither is the aim to produce a unified master theory of magic. The methods involved in this study therefore differ significantly from those of Rensink and Kuhn, as well as those proposed by Lamont. Instead, it attempts to find connections between a range of texts that share a social and cultural context that allows a mapping of the recent developments in televised magic. These connections will be discussed more specifically in Chapter 2, and they show the elasticity of the televised magic encounter. The methodology of case study analysis also suggests points of contact between televised magic and other cultural forms. The case studies will be read through references to performance art, popular film, factual television, and contemporary literature, such that the texts can be said to reflect the ecology of contemporary popular entertainment where media intermingle and are interdependent.

A key motivation for this study is that performance magic is often assumed to be a form that requires the performer and audience to share the same time and space, such that televised magic has only recently begun to be recognised in the emerging academic discussion. Some examples of this perspective and its implications in research literature will be discussed in the next section.

1.2 Assumptions about mediation in magic

For Simon During, the fascination elicited by Harry Houdini's escapes depended on spectators '*witnessing* his triumph over risk, danger, and even death, in that very moment, and not just seeing it represented' (174, emphasis in original). From During's perspective, the films that Houdini financed, wrote, and starred in 'failed because they attempted to exploit what he was famous for, namely those daredevil or "live risk" stunts which are what film (as mechanical reproduction) cannot capture' (174). Here, Houdini's films are presented as pale imitations of his auratic 'live' performances in which a co-present audience would find themselves performing restraint along with Houdini, holding their breath as he struggled valiantly against straitjackets, chains, and locks. In During's account, the 'mechanical reproductions' of his 'stunts' fail to elicit this tension and thus appear to be an aberration of his repertoire, not a credible commercial offering in their own right. Houdini himself eventually shared the view that magic and

technological media were fundamentally incompatible, lamenting, 'No illusion is good in a Film, as we simply resort to *camera trix*, and the deed is did' (qtd. in Kasson 142, emphasis in original). In engaging notions of 'witnessing' 'in the very moment' and 'live risk', During's assessment of Houdini's films seems to regard the literal co-presence in which performer and spectator share the same space and time as crucial to their attraction, a notion of presence which the medium of film erased.

However, Jane Goodall suggests that 'presence' can be multi-dimensional; not merely the result of sharing the same space and time, 'stage presence' requires the performer to 'command the space of the stage' in the present moment in such a way that the 'audience experiences it as "full"' (16). For Goodall, achieving a simultaneity of presence has dimensions other than a literal co-presence, so her understanding provides a useful point of departure to examine the assumptions that performance magic only works in a co-present setting, or that all magic performances share discourse and practices regardless of their degree of technological mediation. These assumptions are apparent in at least two works that aim to establish how magic works, and what magicians do. Yet, this thesis will argue, there are ways of fulfilling the condition of 'presence' that makes televised magic compelling in ways that contribute to Goodall's richer sense of the term, that are not determined solely by co-existence in the same space and time.

Magic in Theory: An Introduction to the Theoretical and Psychological Elements of Conjuring (1999), by Peter Lamont and Richard Wiseman, is frequently cited by other scholars working within the field of performance magic. This speaks to the usefulness of the authors' approach and the multiple ways in which the framework they establish can be interpreted. Lamont and Wiseman are concerned with presenting 'the theoretical and psychological elements of magic as understood by magicians' (x). They offer an 'insider' view of magic that is concerned with how effects are achieved, rather than how they appear to spectators. The authors propose a typology of effects based upon methodological strategies, offering multiple basic techniques (or 'methods', in magicians' parlance) that can be used to perform each type of effect. Lamont and Wiseman identify nine categories of effect, each with several different methods. For example, strategies used to achieve a 'vanish', magicians' terminology for an effect in which an object disappears, include 'Object was not there but appeared to be there', 'Object was secretly removed' and 'Object is still there but concealed' (9-10). As well as methodological strategies, they also explain presentational elements like physical and psychological misdirection, 'that which directs the audience towards the effect and away from the method' (31), and how to hinder the

spectator's 'reconstruction', the process of 'recalling events and attempting to figure out the method behind the effect' (83). The text focuses on explaining magicians' knowledge, identifying patterns and processes that are in use by practitioners using language that is meaningful to a lay audience, so as to 'aid [spectators'] understanding' rather than offering 'a way of solving conjuring tricks' (27). For the authors, 'conjuring theory... is descriptive rather than prescriptive and describes through identifying certain patterns that exist in a range of specific situations' (140).

Magic in Theory addresses *what* magicians do, but it is less concerned with *why* the form is appealing and interesting, and *how* it operates at the level of affect or imagination. Perhaps because of this 'descriptive' rather than analytical objective, Wiseman and Lamont's text also does not address the issue of technologically mediated performance magic, instead conceptualising magic within the parameters of 'live' performance before a co-present audience. There is no discussion of how televised performance magic could be understood differently to performance magic that is not technologically mediated, or what kind of knowledge spectators might need to aid their understanding under these circumstances. The authors discuss the performer's need to 'raise conviction' and 'reduce suspicions' about their actions, because 'the nature of a conjuring performance is such that spectators are suspicious about what is happening' (56). They do not consider how the circumstances of technologically mediated performances might raise or reduce conviction, that these could be either more or less convincing, or offer different modes of engagement than 'live', co-present performances. The authors' conception of performance magic as an encounter that occurs primarily in a co-present form is particularly apparent in certain passages, for example where the authors discuss the process of reconstruction, which 'involves the spectator recalling events and attempting to figure out the method behind the effect' (83). They observe that the reconstruction process can be actively hindered by magicians using techniques such as 'time misdirection', that is, the separation of the moment of method from the moment of the effect through a delay in time between the two (94). In doing so, the text assumes that the performer and spectator are necessarily sharing the same place and time. Surely, techniques of misdirection must operate differently in televised magic, where the viewer is not only dependent on their own perception and memory, but the sound and images perceived through the camera and displayed on a screen? Moreover, the camera can also exclude things from the viewer's field of vision, potentially raising the suspicion of a backstage space where a method could be taking place out of shot. This text, which aims to produce a basic

and fundamental approach to 'what magicians do', excludes any consideration of the effect mediating technology may have upon elements of method, effect, and reception.

Todd Landman produces a more typical 'reading' of what magicians do in the article 'Framing Performance Magic: The Role of Contract, Discourse and Effect' (2013). This is to say that he understands magic performances as a set of signifiers that produce meaning 'co-created' (61) by an audience, but nevertheless does not distinguish between performances that are technologically mediated to different degrees. He partially bases his typology of genre on Lamont and Wiseman's work, using their list of effects and methods to develop a theoretical framework showing how genres and sub-genres of magic are made visible in performance, terming performers and routines that blend these genres 'magical miscegenation' (57). Landman approaches genre through frame (the storytelling around the effect), contract (the relationship between the performer and spectator), and discourse (how frame and contract are communicated in the performance). For example, that there is

a shared frame between psychological illusionists and magicians regarding the role of "magic", or the unknown method for producing inexplicable effects; however, the discourse and effects are markedly different. Magicians perform "tricks", "illusions", and "magical feats" for an audience of 'spectators', while psychological illusionists engage in a series of "demonstrations", "experiments", and "tests" with "participants". (56)

The frame shared by psychological illusionists and magicians is that neither lay claim to any supernatural abilities, and performers tend to establish that the performance is not a 'real' display of inexplicable powers. The genres diverge with regard to the discourse used within the performances, and in achieving a range of effects using different types of methods. Whilst a close-up magician may use methods involving sleight of hand to accomplish levitations, productions and vanishes, psychological illusionists may use mental manipulation to achieve feats of prediction and telepathy. The storytelling of each effect changes with the discourse; where magicians draw on a specifically theatrical language to create a sense of marvel and wonder, psychological illusionists use more clinical vocabulary to establish themselves as expert, lead scientists. Landman's approach is concerned with what magicians do in terms of the resources and strategies they use to create astonishing illusions, alongside the methods and effects that Lamont and Wiseman describe.

Like Lamont and Wiseman, Landman clearly imagines the dominant paradigm of performance magic to be a co-present encounter, which affects his understanding of contract and

discourse between performer and spectator. The study he conducts involves performing several different genres of magic to the same group of spectators, and one of the conclusions he reaches is that 'live performance magic can develop experiences and feelings relating to trust and belief' (60). The effectiveness of the 'mentalists' model, for example, is predicated upon spatial relations, so that Landman describes himself as "'walking amongst" [spectators], interacting, asking for them to think of things', all of which contribute to the understanding of the encounter as a 'co-created' performance (61). How might trust and belief then be built in performances where the magician cannot physically 'walk among' spectators, but addresses them through a screen? What opportunities are there to empower audiences of a technologically mediated encounter to become 'co-creators'? These questions remain unaddressed in this account of what magicians do. Furthermore, Landman does not approach the idea that some genres and sub-genres may be even be partly constituted by their technological mediation, such as street magic. Both Dynamo and David Blaine, who Landman identifies as 'popular exemplars' of street magic, routinely perform predictions and 'psychokinesis',⁴ which belong to the larger category of 'mentalism' (55), suggesting this method of categorisation is not always tenable. Ensuing chapters will suggest that, rather than a particular 'genre' with its own distinct materials and effects, 'street' magic may instead be constituted by its discourses, of the 'street' as an idiom, and the conventions of reality television upon which it draws.

In aiming to categorise what magicians do, *Magic in Theory* and 'Framing Performance Magic' seem to reflect the normative assumption that performance magic ontologically requires a co-present audience, either through omitting discussion of technologically mediated magic altogether, or failing to fully interrogate it. Other perspectives on mediation in magic offer different approaches, opening up the notion of magic as a form that interacts with a variety of media. The body of work examining the relationships between magic and early film is of particular interest, as is the growing scholarship on magic and contemporary television.

1.3 Magic as technologically mediated

Technologically mediated elements have historically been used in a range of commercial entertainments that sought to produce the appearance of supernatural phenomena. Pepper's

⁴ 'Psychokinesis' is the manipulation of objects without using physical force, such as 'the bending of keys, coins, spoons, knives and forks' (Landman 56).

Ghost, for example, was an apparatus premiered in 1862 that used optical illusions to cause spectral figures to appear and disappear on stage. Beth A. Kattelman explains:

Pepper's Ghost uses a large pane of plate glass and carefully controlled illumination to allow audience members to view the reflections of hidden performers alongside performers who are seen directly on stage. With careful blocking and timing, the two sets of characters can (seem to) interact, giving the impression that the ephemeral, semi-transparent figures inhabit the same spatiotemporal environment as their more solid, corporeal counterparts. (198)



Figure 1. Lithograph depicting the workings of Pepper's Ghost. From the Richard Balzer collection, with permission.

The Ghost was used in a variety of entertainments as well as performance magic, for example 'in lectures, traditional full-length theatre pieces, novelty presentations, and touring fairground exhibitions, during the latter part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries' (Kattelman 198). According to Steinmeyer, magicians 'were presented with an entirely new range of secrets based on Pepper's Ghost', adapting the principles of the cumbersome, complex, and

expensive apparatus to more practical purposes (75). Steinmeyer indicates that among the resulting inventions were the Proteus illusion, a mirrored cabinet that could cause occupants to vanish and another body to appear in their stead (78), and the Sphinx, where a box was opened to reveal a human head that smiled, answered questions, and declaimed dramatic verse, before disappearing once the box was closed (83-4). As a mediating technology that intervenes between the body of the performer and the perceptions of the audience, Pepper's Ghost illustrates the uncertainties of the boundary between 'live', co-present illusionistic performance and early cinema. Indeed, the 'Golden Age' of magic, between the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, has been a significant period for film and media scholars over the past four decades, as film historians have sought to recover early cinema's origins in performance. In *The Magician and the Cinema* (1981), Erik Barnouw argues that performance magic's popularity as entertainment declined as that of cinema rose in Britain and the United States. While magicians became interested in the artistic and commercial potential of cinematic technology, film was used as a medium for the representation of magic effects.

For Barnouw, 'the magician was indeed a film pioneer' (5), and the relationship between film and magic 'can be seen as the logical outcome of more than a century of scientific magic, in which optics were always important' (16). The cast of characters in Barnouw's work includes such luminaries of the mid-to-late Victorian magic scene as John Nevil Maskelyne, father of *Our Magic* author Nevil Maskelyne, and his erstwhile business partner and co-author of *Our Magic*, David Devant. In Barnouw's account, Maskelyne Sr. refused to invest in hiring a piece of equipment called 'the Cinématographe', an apparatus developed by the Lumière brothers in 1895 and debuted in London the following year by magician Felicien Trewey. Dismayed by Trewey's news that the equipment had already been leased by another venue, and in Maskelyne's lack of interest in the new technology, Devant turned to the rival manufacturer Robert W. Paul who was prepared to sell his device, the 'projecting Kinetoscope' (54). The partnership was a success, with Devant receiving commission for any devices he was able to sell through his connections in the entertainment world, and eventually the pair began to produce their own films, which in turn revived the fortunes of Maskelyne's venue, the Egyptian Hall, once they could be exhibited there (56). The importance of Devant's role as broker appears, for Barnouw, to seal the connection between film technology and performance magic; Devant sold Kinetoscopes to fellow magicians, including one to Carl Hertz, who exhibited the machine in South Africa, Australia and India, and two to Georges Méliès, who as a pioneer of trick films would go on to shape the use of special

effects in film-making. The networks and creative practices of magicians were thus crucial as a means of disseminating film technology. However, magicians' forays into film were not always successful, Harry Houdini's 'flaccid melodramas' (Kasson 142) being a case in point,⁵ and Barnouw implies that film eventually outgrew its magical associations by 1905, by which time 'films were becoming longer, more serious, more romantic. Handsome heroines and heroes were becoming central concerns. Motion pictures were turning into big business. It was an arena for giant corporations, not individual artisans' (103). In Barnouw's analysis, 'the appetites that drew crowds to magic theatre continued to be served- by movie palaces, Disneyland, radio, television, cable, satellites' (104), such that performance magic effectively became redundant in the face of these technologically mediated entertainments. Ultimately, he suggests that the entanglement of performance magic and cinema was entirely to the benefit of cinema, and the detriment of magic.

Yet, others have argued for a more intermedial understanding of the relationship between magic and early film, that allows a fuller understanding of their shared formal qualities and reception context. As well as opportunities for commercial development, performance magic practices could be used to anchor unfamiliar filmic devices within pre-existing cultural images and discourse. Matthew Solomon more closely examines the relationship between performance and early cinema, 'emphasizing how certain cinematic practices were derived (however indirectly) from the theatre' and the 'permeable' nature of the boundaries between media (7; 8). Departing from Barnouw's insistence on the separation between magic and film, Solomon suggests that 'instead of understanding media as "containers" for one another', 'we consider their respective identities as fundamentally blurred and their historical relationships as highly symmetrical' (6). He points to the 'distinctively intermedial character' of early film, as opposed to the 'set of relatively stable institutions and practices that had coalesced by 1915', that is, cinema as an industry (7). This intermediality is apparent in Georges Méliès' film *Escamotage d'une Dame chez Robert-Houdin* (*The Vanishing Lady at the Robert-Houdin Theatre*, 1896). A magician places a cloth over a seated woman to cover her, then pulls it away to reveal that she has vanished. The magician performs some flourishing gestures, apparently casting a spell to bring her back, but a skeleton appears in her place. The horrified magician covers the skeleton once more with the cloth, and the woman reappears, thus '[joining] together... two different and distinct illusions, the Disappearing Lady and the Appearing Lady, which had previously been performed separately and

⁵ *The Master Mystery* (1919) and *Terror Island* (1920) are specifically mentioned by Kasson.

involved entirely different apparatuses' (Solomon 33). Méliès' film is marked by the scenic conventions of stage illusion, such as the use of a proscenium arch, placing a sheet of newspaper beneath the woman's chair to show that a trapdoor could not be involved in her disappearance, and taking bows before an invisible, but presumably appreciative, audience. Yet the illusion was not carried out using the techniques of the stage, but rather depended upon the affordances of the new mediating technology of film. Solomon identifies the use of a substitution splice in this film, cutting the frames 'that were overexposed in the process of stopping and subsequently restarting the camera before and after a substitution was made in the scene' (33). A century later, David Blaine would be suspected of using a similar technique in the levitation effect performed at the end of his first street magic television special in 1997.⁶ Cinema could thus draw on an image repertoire of vanishing and reappearance that was already available in performance magic, merging them to create a new attraction.

This intermediality has implications not just for the formal techniques of cinema, but also its reception. Dan North shares Solomon's reading of early cinema as an intermedial form derived partly from performance. North comments that 'magic culture in the nineteenth century... was an exploration of the limits of human skill to amaze and baffle using a combination of practised artistry and scientifically advanced (or obscure) mechanisms', so that performance magic effectively prepared the public for viewing film (73). North associates the appeal of early cinema with viewing practices inculcated by magic, in that

viewers accustomed to watching a stage illusion without being deceived, but being invited to locate the mechanism behind a cloak of narrative immersion and showman's flourishes, would find artistic and technical nourishment when asked to view a film-show introduced by a magician as part of a repertoire of magic tricks. (78)

This builds on the work of Tom Gunning, who in the essay 'An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator' (2004)⁷ argues for the implausibility of one of the 'founding

⁶ Contemporary cinematic representations of magic continue to use both in-camera and post-production effects, such as the 'rain-stopping' effect performed by Jesse Eisenberg's character in *Now You See Me 2* (2016). The difference between these representations of performance magic and the televised magic with which this thesis is concerned is that the former are already framed as fictional, while the latter display an ambiguous reality status. This will be discussed further in section 2.2.

⁷ This essay first appeared in *Art and Text*, Fall, 1989, however this study cites a reprinted version from a 2004 anthology entitled *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, Volume 3.

myths of the cinema's spectator' (79), that is, the reportedly terrified reaction of the audience at the Paris exhibition of the Lumière brothers' *L'Arrivée d'un Train en Gare de La Ciotat* (*The Arrival of a Train in La Ciotat Station*, 1895).

Gunning insists that 'we cannot swallow whole the image of the naïve spectator, whose reaction to the image is one of simple belief and panic; it needs digesting' (79). Rather, between the mid-1890s and early 1900s, the film-going audience experienced the 'aesthetic of attraction', which is notable for its direct mode of address, '[soliciting] a highly conscious awareness of the film image engaging with the spectator's curiosity', so that 'the spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfilment' (84). With an urgency and purpose that resembles the motion of the train, 'the images of the cinema of attractions rush forwards to meet their viewers' (84). The effect produced by the aesthetic of attraction is primarily the 'thrill', focused by the presence of the 'showman lecturer', a 'live' performer who presented the film to the audience, as the film 'performs its act of display and fades away' (84-5). Unlike the empathic identification encouraged by narrative cinema, 'thrill' allows the spectator the pleasure of viewing while warding off credulity, so it is not necessary to accept the images as 'real' in order to enjoy them. In Gunning's view, both performance magic and early cinema are part of a constellation of 'illusionistic arts of the nineteenth century' that 'cannily exploited their unbelievable nature, keeping a conscious focus on the fact that they were only illusions', their audience comprising 'sophisticated urban pleasure seekers, well aware that they were seeing the most modern techniques in stagecraft' (81; 80). Elsewhere, Gunning observes that Méliès himself described his trick films as 'a pretext for the "stage effects", the "tricks", or for a nicely arranged tableau' ('The Cinema of Attractions' 64). As shall be discussed in later chapters, a range of narrative structures and styles in contemporary televised magic continue to underpin the spectacular attractions of the effects.

What Gunning implies, and Solomon and North specifically point towards in their work, is that audiences were already accustomed to the types of viewing practices inculcated by early cinema, due to their consumption of magic performances throughout the Victorian era. Joe Kember discusses this more explicitly, seeking to recover the origins of early film, often imagined as the 'chaotic' antecedent to a more coherent, institutionalised cinema, by recognising that this institutionalisation 'depended upon the accumulation and assimilation of all manner of earlier communicative and performative practices' (32). Kember identifies the specific spectatorial practice of the 'expert audience', and he suggests a 'knowing contemplation' was elicited amongst

audiences by magic performances that also exhibited new technologies in the late 1890s, such as the 'changing roster of attractions' at St George's Hall- overseen by John Nevil Maskelyne, proprietor of the aforementioned Egyptian Hall (35). Kember emphasises the creativity and efficacy of these audiences, since they played a role in 'determining the way [magic shows] were to be experienced, and played a key part in reproducing, and sometimes introducing change to, these institutionalized conventions' (34). Sometimes, this agency manifested in unexpected ways: Kember draws on reports of two instances where technology malfunctioned during an exhibition to argue that apparent failures were in fact moments of revelation in which 'the apparatus and its operators as direct objects of the audience's attention... are actually represented as the most characteristic moments of the entertainment: at the heart of the fun for its expert audiences' (40). He concludes that:

Rather than hapless consumers, awash amid a sea of images, these individuals were capable of exercising a degree of control over their apparently bewildering, media-saturated environment. Thus, though spectators were certainly subjected to powerful institutional continuities that played a dominant role in managing the experiences they took from the show, they were also capable of exercising a degree of mastery in relation to the shows, and they played an important, creative part in ongoing processes of institutional change. (44)

For Kember, audiences brought this 'expertise', fostered by performance magic throughout the mid-Victorian era, to the intermedial exhibitions of early film technology. The suggestion that audiences of intermedial performance magic were invited to engage with the shows in a critical and curious manner, with an awareness of the various levels of fiction and reality at play, invites the question as to whether contemporary televised performances similarly make space for a range of responses and promote audience agency. This is a key issue which will be picked up repeatedly in the following chapters. This is not to say that nineteenth century magic with intermedial elements is equivalent to performance that takes place within the medium of broadcast television. Rather, these accounts of the entwined histories of magic and film complicate the notion of magic as a form that resists technological mediation.

Recently, scholarship has not only acknowledged but has actively moved towards considering televised works as a part of the assemblage of performance magic. For Nik Taylor and Stuart Nolan, magic has 'found ways to inhabit and energise both film and TV, just as it is now inhabiting and innovating new media' such that the contemporary scene 'now rivals that of the

golden age in terms of popularity and overshadows it both in invention and in its astonishing scope' (128). Here, media platforms are presented as playing an integral role in the revitalisation of performance magic. Looking more specifically at individual performers and performances, Mangan points to Uri Geller as using 'television as an essential tool of his magic, standing on its head the commonplace that magic only really works in a live setting' (175). Mangan argues that the 'most effective stage' for Geller was 'the TV chat show', a form that 'creates and exploits celebrity at the same time as its contrived intimacy appears to deny the falseness of celebrity', since it purports to offer a glimpse into the 'apparently offstage' real life of the subject (175). Geller's use of a televisual staging that suggested 'real life', as opposed to artifice and theatricality, is reflected in contemporary televised magic, which uses a range of settings and discourses to indicate its 'reality'. Mangan's account of Geller's effectiveness suggests that television is able to recruit different stagings and spaces to produce performance magic.

For Mangan, contemporary media not only present a variety of stagings for performance magic but are also crucial in shaping an environment in which issues of reality, belief, enchantment, and scepticism are of primary importance to audiences. He argues that magic appears in a postmodern cultural context as 'a form of compensation for something lost: in an age of science and technology, belief in magic (which came naturally to earlier societies) is no longer available to us', and that magic allows us to 'experience imaginatively a kind of echo of the past and convince ourselves temporarily that the world is still full of wonder and magic' (191). This longing for a vanished world recognises the need for an alternative to the dominant mode of 'modern knowing' as 'rational, sceptical, and scientific in tone', manifested through occult beliefs and practices, and magical fantasy genres of literature, film, television, and other popular culture forms (191). Mangan notes that whilst 'it seems natural to identify our "own" culture within the values of reason and science, and cultures of the past (or distant present) with superstition and magic', 'we too have our magical beliefs and the complexity of present-day culture allows for many strands' (194). The environment that Mangan describes is one in which enchantment is not dispersed by 'modern knowing', but which enables both to flourish due to a variety of cultural practices that are technologically mediated to different degrees. The pleasures of performance magic in contemporary culture are multiple according to Graham M. Jones:

[t]he style and ethos of close-up magic are particularly well-suited to the present cultural climate, privileging embodied skills and human contact in an era when entertainment is so often associated with high-tech production and mediation.

Spectators, mainly accustomed to seeing magic on television specials, often remark how much more gratifying it is to have a magician performing in close proximity. (*Trade of the Tricks* 21-2)

While Jones' position seems closer to Houdini's that 'No illusion is good in Film' on this point, this passage is important for noting that technologically mediated performance evokes desire for what is felt by spectators to be the 'live', co-present equivalent. This desire could be read, following Auslander, as a function of 'mediatization', where 'live' performance 'translates into symbolic capital in the appropriate cultural contexts', the 'evanescence' of the 'live' performance '[giving] it value in terms of cultural prestige' (58). Co-present performances of magic effects are perhaps felt by Jones' spectators to offer a more intimate and memorable experience. Although this desire may arguably be artificially stimulated by mediating technology, Jones' comment suggests that technologically mediated and 'live', co-present modes of performance magic are, to some extent, mutually dependent. Twenty-first century media culture allows performance magic to flourish, whether that be by offering new forms of staging, or creating a context in which the notion of enchantment is valued. Some of the precise ways in which illusion and deception operate in a culture that imagines itself to be 'rational, sceptical, and scientific' will be discussed in the following chapter.

The literature mentioned so far indicates that specific approaches to televised magic are warranted for a fuller analysis, and one recent study in particular is focused on understanding the production of 'liveness', meaning a sense of authenticity, immediacy, and spontaneity, in televised street magic. In 'Deception Reality: Street Magic from Blaine to Dynamo' (2015), Max Sexton argues that Blaine and Dynamo 'have both resisted and sought an alternative to the 'corniness' of television magic', since 'the studio-based show with the magician performing to an audience on stage appears to have little appeal today' (29). Sexton notes that Blaine and Dynamo's work uses a 'mixed programme of small scale, sleight-of-hand effects, and large-scale events' (27). For Sexton, this 'mixed programme' of practice generates two distinct but mutually dependent modalities, as close-up magic is used to signify a more intimate, authentic, and immediate engagement, and larger scale events signify the 'mediatised "marvel"' (35). These two modalities generate internal tensions within the text, as the spectacular 'marvel' is 'coded as transparent', openly acknowledging its staging as a multiply mediated event, while the 'authentically real' as signalled through close-up effects is 'often displayed as a form of spectacle' (35). According to the article, though, this tension can be resolved through using 'real people in

real places' 'to represent a direct access to live happenings', their reactions used to 'suggest emotional registers *and* communicate the experience of a communal happening' (28; 30). There is a clear connection here with reality television, since this use of ordinary people 'fulfils television's obsession with the real' whereby 'mundane situations become drama' (36). In this analysis, televised magic finds its appeal to the real not through the 'authentication of reality', but through 'the authenticity of the means by which the real has been portrayed' (36). Sexton's work suggests a number of useful ways forward for this thesis, for example the argument that the conditions of authenticity that are necessary for magic performances can be communicated through mediating technology. This study will identify a variety of strategies used to communicate authenticity and a sense of 'liveness' in subsequent chapters. Also, Sexton identifies the core dramatic structure of 'street magic' that acknowledges its distinctiveness from previous forms, namely the smaller, more intimate effects building to a climactic, multiply mediated marvel. Using this concept as a point of departure can open up an exploration of how televised magic has developed to incorporate different televisual strategies, styles, and narratives, and how a range of narrative structures and devices are used alongside the spectacles of the magic effects themselves.

These ideas are further explored in Sexton's recently-published monograph *Secular Magic and the Moving Image: Mediated Forms and Modes of Reception* (2018), which shares many of the concerns of this thesis, further indicating the current significance of this area. In particular, Sexton notes the conditions of realism and 'reality', liveness, the extraordinary embedded in the everyday, and movements between 'certainty and scepticism' within audiences (1; 4) that characterise televised magic in the twenty-first century and that will recur also in this study. As the book spans British television's early development in the 1950s to the present day, there is also naturally some overlap between Sexton's points of reference and the following, including a shared interest in the case studies to be discussed and in reality television as a site of critical engagement. Since this work was made available very shortly before this thesis was due to be submitted, it is an unfortunate matter of timing that it is not addressed in this text. However, several key points of divergence as well as shared concerns should be noted. Where *Secular Magic and the Moving Image* analyses the 'television text... as an industrial form of aesthetic practice' to produce 'a study of genre within the moving image' (10), situating televised performance magic using televisual paradigms such as light entertainment broadcasts (36), the following study rather takes an opposite tack. As its disciplinary grounding is in theatre and performance, rather than

media studies, it assumes the primacy of performance practice that has adapted to the moving images of television, as is reflected in its employment of remediation as a theoretical framework whilst referring to traditions of 'live' practice. It also responds to discussions of terms such as 'liveness' and 'mediation' as they have occurred with relation to theatre and performance. The works furthermore differ in method, with this study using detailed analysis of case studies to relate the television texts to each other as well as noting influences from broader media culture. Also, where Sexton dismisses 'binaries between the real and the fictive' as 'outmoded' (65), this thesis draws out the value of these terms as analytical tools. Attending to the multiple modalities of fiction and reality that are present in the case studies, and indeed the tension between these terms, allows this analysis to include such contested and vexed notions as the 'real', the 'staged', and the 'illusory' that are central to performance magic.

Read alongside each other, these perspectives on magic and technological mediation across various historical moments offer a challenge to the notion of performance magic as an encounter that only functions with a singular co-present audience. Film scholars concerned with the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have demonstrated the productive entanglement of performance magic with early cinema, artistically in their repertoire and form, and commercially in their exhibition and reception context. Crucially, their work shows that audiences were attuned to various levels of mediation at play in representations of magic on film, and that this awareness added to their appreciation of the attractions. At the same time, work that addresses technologically mediated forms of magic is now developing within the fields of media, theatre, and performance studies, providing forward momentum for the present study by making the case for televised magic as a significant form in its own right, rather than an aberration of the dominant mode of 'live', co-present performance. Bringing together these current strands of performance magic research encourages the question as to how television might produce different stagings and possibilities for performance magic in the context of twenty-first century culture, as cinema has done in the past.

1.4 Structure of thesis

The aim of this introductory chapter has been to articulate the research questions, asking what magicians have retained of magic's past performance conventions and how the mediating technology of television is used in their work, and contextualise this within existing research. This

study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on performance magic by closely analysing a range of texts produced by various contemporary performers, whose work is primarily produced for and disseminated through television. It draws mainly on relevant literature written for academic or more general audiences, rather than for practising magicians. Where previous research has worked within clinical parameters and attempted to describe what magicians do, this study takes a qualitative approach in an attempt to relate performances to the environment in which they are produced, building upon a growing interest in televised performance magic among scholars from a range of disciplines. Having oriented this study to the shifting landscape of performance magic research, the final section of this chapter will map out what is to follow.

Chapter 2 proceeds by addressing the theoretical background to this study. Following Taylor and Nolan, 'As contemporary performance magic has been largely untouched by academic theory, we may ask: what kinds of theory can help us to understand such an art?' (140). This chapter surveys a range of performance, cultural, and media theory that is concerned with notions of magic, illusion, and enchantment in a broader cultural context. Section 2.1 opens by considering the notion of mediation itself as a process of perceiving and interpreting signs that shapes experience, as proposed by Tia DeNora (2014). This is useful for qualifying the meaning of the term 'mediation' in this thesis, as this study seeks an understanding of mediation that can capture the specificity of televised magic, for which Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation (2000) is key. Following their arguments concerning the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy that coexist in remediated texts, which desire to 'get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real' (53), and Peter M. Boenisch's application of these arguments to theatre and performance (2006), it will be argued that televised magic can be described as a remediated practice. This remediation is especially apparent in the practice of 'street magic', wherein magic effects that might belong to the category of 'busking' or 'strolling' magic are remediated by televisual apparatus and discourses to achieve a sense of authenticity. This has been critiqued by practitioners of performance magic including Jamy Ian Swiss (2007), for whom the very fact of street magic's commitment to television, itself an illusory medium, undercuts any claim it might have to reality. Contesting Swiss, this thesis rather advocates taking these claims seriously, acknowledging the intermediality and fluidity of performance magic in a contemporary context, and reading the tensions between 'live' and remediated forms as productive ones.

The chapter then goes on to clarify the multiple modalities of fiction and reality that are said by During (2002) to be an essential characteristic of performance magic in section 2.2, arguing

that these may be also be found in televised magic performances. This study draws a distinction between media that represent performance magic within a narrative already discursively framed as fiction, as in the film *The Illusionist* (2006), and those in which fiction and reality are deliberately collapsed to produce what During terms 'a fiction of the real', illusions that 'simulate (rather than represent) reality non-linguistically' (58). Televised magic performances fall into the latter category, as is evidenced by analysing an effect from the *Paul Daniels Show*, in which the events shown are to be understood as taking place in 'real' space and time, even if this space and time are not shared by the viewer. Moreover, these televised magic performances take place within a context that has been imagined as 're-enchanted', in which a sense of enchantment has been lost and subsequently regained, by a range of cultural elements that allow people to experience a different dimension of the modern world, delighting audiences without deluding them (Landy and Saler 2009).

Section 2.3 argues that enchantment is a discourse that runs through the 'everyday', whether the 'everyday' is represented as a site of illusion (Lefebvre 1987) or of transformation (DeNora 2014). The centrality of magic to modernity, especially in visual culture and popular entertainment, is explored through the concepts of 'glamour' (Gundle and Castelli 2006) and celebrity as 'effigy' (Roach 2007). Televised magic is deeply invested in maintaining the uncertainty as to whether these secular magics seduce and bedazzle their audiences, or whether they are a result of the spells audiences cast to enliven the world around them. Doubly articulated as illusion, presenting illusion through an apparatus that already creates illusion, the 'everyday', familiar yet mystifying technology of television also possesses a reflexivity specific to its form. As many television scholars have suggested, people can and do 'look through' television texts (Skeggs and Wood 2012) to interpret and critique them according to their own experiences, while being affectively moved by televisual representations of the 'real' (Kavka 2008). Televised magic exploits the ambiguity regarding reality that such media interactions can produce, even finding ways to incorporate sceptical or 'savvy' (Andrejevic 2004) responses into its narratives. Televised magic anticipates critical responses, developing strategies to show the 'realness' of its spectacles and inviting viewers to move between positions of belief and scepticism (Hill 2011).

From here, the following three chapters look specifically at case studies. Chapter 3 examines David Blaine's early street magic specials, which are often credited as the starting point for the form of street magic. The chapter's opening section, 3.1, explores the television specials *Street Magic* (ABC, 1997) and *Magic Man* (ABC, 1998). Drawing from analysis of reality

programming, 'candid camera' prank shows, and reaction videos, forms that resource ordinary people as media content (G. Turner 2010), it argues that the recruiting of passers-by as spectators is key in establishing the authenticity of Blaine's feats in these texts. The physical, verbal, and emotional responses of the spectators invite viewers to believe that something truly extraordinary has occurred; however, this also opens up a form of engagement whereby the spectator themselves can be objects of amusement, judgement, and criticism. There is thus a discrepancy between the spectators who appear onscreen and the viewers watching the televised effect. The spectator's designation as signifier of 'reality' becomes more ambiguous when they are a well-known celebrity, their associations with the overtly fictionalised and illusory world of stardom calling into question the apparent reality of Blaine's effects.

Section 3.2 examines the role that actual geographical locations play in creating simulations of reality in these early street magic specials. As a performance venue, the 'street' rejects the stasis implied by the setting of a theatre or studio, instead indicating a sense of movement as Blaine travels between familiar, everyday places in the urban United States. This dislocation of performance magic creates a further ambiguity regarding real and fictional elements of Blaine's magic, emphasising Blaine's persona as a blend of 'shaman' and 'showman' (Lavender 2016). The streets that appear in these texts are aestheticised, seeming disconnected from material realities of living in these localities, in a manner reminiscent of hip-hop 'cut and mix' cultural practices. Moreover, the setting of everyday urbanity is brought into relief against the 'elsewhere', when the location shifts from mainland US to the global south. Where it seems that the spectators encountered in the everyday environments of the American city suffered from an excess of rationality, those represented as Other possess an excess of credulity. The different representational strategies of these 'real' places assert Blaine's skill in shifting between performance modes, embodying multiple dimensions of fiction and reality simultaneously.

From here, the chapter moves on to discuss two of Blaine's stunt performances, which formed most of his output from 1999 to 2012. An emphasis on Blaine's body as the 'causal [agent] of effects of impossibility' (Rolfe 585) is iterated in the multiply mediated events *Above the Below* (2003) and *Dive of Death* (2008). These endurance stunts have been described as 'non-matrixed magic' (Mangan 189), a phrase that summons Michael Kirby's category of 'non-matrixed' acting, where the actor 'is not imbedded, as it were, in matrices of pretended or represented character, situation, place and time' (Kirby 4). Section 3.3 argues that *Above the Below* has a conceptual affinity with popular media, especially reality television, yet the meanings of the event were

contested by journalists and academics. Exploring the piece in relation to Chris Burden's early work suggests that *Above the Below* seems to invite a detached form of spectatorship, in contrast to the demands placed upon Burden's audience. Footage from the durational event was later remediated as a documentary (*Above the Below*, Channel 4, 2003), which seemed to complicate the event's claim to the real by highlighting overtly performed elements of Blaine's persona and shaping the meaning of the performance.

In the case of *Dive of Death*, the subject of section 3.4, the effects of this remediation are even more pronounced, since the work effectively recuperates a durational stunt that was widely derided as a failure. The work's context, determined by social and political values extrinsic to the piece and the prior expectations established for Blaine's feats of endurance, mean that the repercussions of this failure seem especially egregious. Such repercussions include the erosion of the notion of Blaine's body as extraordinary, and an inadvertent foregrounding of the vulnerabilities and contingencies of the televisual apparatus. Footage from the stunt was then used in a documentary featuring a number of illusions (*What is Magic?*, Travel Channel, 2010), which reinforced the myth of Blaine's superhuman body. Through the intervention of television, the body of the performer returns to the visual and thematic centre of the text, its power and agency showcased, and its weaknesses minimised.

Chapter 4 analyses episodes from the television series *Dynamo: Magician Impossible* (Watch, 2011- 2014), starring the magician Dynamo, in which the influences of *Street Magic* and *Magic Man* are clearly identifiable. Section 4.1 opens with discussion of a 2013 episode set in New York City ('New York'), referencing the superhero as a performer of extraordinary, spectacular bodily acts. Here, the city is depicted as an enchanted place that allows the expression of Dynamo's agency through storied places and emblematic objects that also characterise everyday urban rhythms. Yet, following the tropes of post 9/11 live-action superhero films, the city appears as endangered by the destruction of Hurricane Sandy, imminent at the time of filming. Dynamo responds to this disaster by performing a large-scale illusion using the mobile phones of spectators, enacting a healing that constructs the city as a less tangible and therefore less vulnerable public realm (Sennett 2010).

The association with live-action superheroes is nevertheless a risky strategy, as such figures are hybrids of 'real' human bodies and digital technology, which may point to the 'savvy' (Andrejevic 2004) critique that Dynamo's televised effects are equally abstracted from real performance conditions. Section 4.2 argues that *Magician Impossible* anticipates this critique by

acknowledging its status as a mediated fiction and creating space in the programmes for a range of responses, including scepticism. Illusions in which the interplay of fiction and reality is particularly apparent include sequences of Dynamo walking across the Thames ('England', 2011), and levitating above the Shard ('Bradford', 2014). In the former sequence, elements of the scene such as spectators' reactions, Dynamo's apparent arrest, and the reference to Christian iconography allow it to be read as alternately real and fictional, establishing the dramatic conceit that the effect is taking place 'for real' only to deliberately undermine it. The Shard levitation draws attention to the media apparatus that facilitates the effect, playfully addressing the potential critique that Dynamo's 'magic' must all take place in post-production and thereby reminding viewers that they are unable to fully distinguish fiction from reality in his work. Rather than attempting to minimise a savvy, sceptical response that would deny the reality of the effects, the programme anticipates and engages with these perspectives.

Notions of reality in *Magician Impossible* are also grounded in Dynamo's personal connections to a home community, as evidenced in a 2014 episode ('Bradford'), and this is the subject of section 4.3. Dynamo's performance of self can be said to 'keep it real', a textual strategy of drawing on a performative 'moment before fame' to create the celebrity self (Littler 2004). This section engages with scholarship on home video (Moran 2002) and reality television that argues for television's capacity to produce intimacy (Kavka 2008). The home videos that appear in this episode may be construed as a way of performing a 'moment before fame' that nevertheless facilitates a 'dedifferentiation' (Andrejevic 2004) between Dynamo's personal and professional activities. There is both a visual dedifferentiation, as amateur home video and professional media are integrated into the same text, and a thematic dedifferentiation, as Dynamo's family appears alongside celebrity guest stars to create material for the show. The 'realness' of Dynamo's past life thus can be seen as a resource to narrate and justify his present celebrity status.

Section 4.4 argues that the 'world' represented in *Magician Impossible* is influenced by representations of existing locations to associate them with transformation. The 2014 episode⁸ in which Dynamo returns to his home town of Bradford ('Bradford') contests the dominant modes of representation of the city, by imagining Bradford as a resilient community that is attempting to

⁸ This episode also contains the Shard levitation and the home video sequences discussed in sections 4.2 and 4.3 respectively; as the final episode to be produced for *Magician Impossible*, it is a particularly rich text in which Dynamo's persona has reached its fullest realisation.

transform itself. This can be read as a parallel narrative to Dynamo's own life story. The final case study of the chapter appears in a 2013 episode set in Ibiza ('Ibiza'), where tourists seek transformation through the ability to live a kind of life abroad that they perceive to be inaccessible at home. The structure of work in *Magician Impossible* takes on an ambiguous character, as the work of being filmed performing magic appears to intrude on 'leisure' time in a tourist space. The fictions of the magic effects are subsumed into various narratives in which there is an uncertainty as to the boundary between fiction and non-fiction, reality and unreality. Ultimately, it is left deliberately unclear whether the fictions of the magic effects disclose the fictional nature of Dynamo's 'journey' through the 'streets', or whether the reality of the narrative supports the reality of the astonishing spectacles performed.

Chapter 5 discusses the work of Derren Brown, beginning from Annette Hill's characterisation of his work as 'beyond the concept of magic' (135), to suggest that his performances of psychological illusion also effect a return to performance magic's theatrical past.⁹ These works offer a sense of transparency without fully disclosing the illusions used in their production. *The Heist* (Channel 4, 2006), for example, uses a reenactment of the notorious Milgram obedience study.¹⁰ Section 5.1 argues that this reenactment ostensibly works as a mechanism for producing new knowledge of the past, and scientific knowledge of human psychology in the present, offering viewers the tools to develop a critical awareness of the issues raised in the programme. However, this commitment to the production of knowledge is far from straightforward. It paradoxically depends upon participants remaining unaware of the 'dual reality' nature of the experiment, so denying them 'scientific' awareness in order to activate it in

⁹ In Landman's typology of magic, 'psychological illusionists engage in a series of "demonstrations", "experiments", and "tests" with "participants"' (56). Arguably, Brown's interventions exceed this definition, creating immersive environments that demand a strenuous engagement from participants that are recorded and broadcast for the benefit of a broader viewership in a way that would not be possible but for the mediating presence of the camera.

¹⁰ In these notorious experiments, participants were asked to inflict increasingly severe electric shocks upon an unseen 'learner' when they failed to correctly memorise a pairing of words under the guise of studying 'the presumed relationship between punishment and learning' (Milgram 373). An 'experimenter' would verbally prompt the participant to continue administering the shocks even when the learner did not respond, but would not attempt to prevent the participant from leaving. However, the equipment for administering shocks was fake and the experiment was in fact designed to measure obedience to authority- in this case, the experimenter. Under these conditions, even with the audible (recorded) screams and pleas of the learner begging to be released, sixty-five percent of participants complied with the demands of the experimenter to the end of the test, administering the final 450-volt shock (Milgram 376).

the viewer. It is also troubled by the show's presentation of scientific knowledge as stable and fixed, without addressing critiques of the Milgram study that have since emerged. Despite explicitly disavowing the notion of theatricality that the idea of 'reenactment' summons, this very theatricality is nevertheless later called upon to justify the show's prioritising of entertainment over ethical rigor. Reenactment in Brown's works may be a form of 'partial explanations' (Hill 172), which seem to disclose the method behind the illusion while affirming Brown's capacity to psychologically influence spectators.

This capacity for influence is represented again in *Séance* (Channel 4, 2004), which partakes in the performance magic tradition of 'debunking' paranormal phenomena. Section 5.2 discusses how *Séance* restages a range of Victorian spiritualist practices, showing how these phenomena can be convincingly faked. Again, this apparent commitment to knowledge requires further critical analysis. Following the work of Simone Natale (2016), it will be argued that both paranormal phenomena and their debunking can be considered part of a coherent culture of spectacular entertainment termed 'the magic assemblage' by During (66). Through its multiple forms of viewer engagement, *Séance* likewise cultivates an epistemic uncertainty as to the reality status of the paranormal spectacles it features, suggesting ultimately that while such events *can* convincingly be faked, it does not follow that they *are* all faked. Thus, *Séance* enables and encourages movement between belief and scepticism on the part of the viewer.

From this point onwards, the chapter will discuss texts that centre around one individual protagonist, rather than a group of participants. These works are typical of Brown's more recent programmes, since the environment of the performance shifts to a studio or purpose-built set, and the protagonist is unaware that the events taking place around them are a simulation of reality. The subject of section 5.3, *Apocalypse* (Channel 4, 2012), stages an experience that draws upon popular film, simulating a society ravaged by an incurable virus similar to those seen in zombie disaster movies, in order to transform the protagonist into a functioning and productive citizen. *Apocalypse* uses the trope of the zombie to dramatise the fragility of media systems and devices and the risks of depending too much upon them, framing them as a potential vector of social 'disease' for both the protagonist and the viewer. Although it aims to arouse mistrust, even paranoia, with regard to media, *Apocalypse* does not acknowledge its own complicity as a media text, presenting viewers with a dilemma as to why they should place faith in the aspects of the programme announced as real.

The notion of participation is examined more closely in the final section of the chapter, 5.4, which discusses *Pushed to the Edge* (Channel 4, 2016). In this programme, an unsuspecting protagonist becomes implicated in a series of stressful events and is pressured to repeatedly behave in antisocial ways, culminating in a situation where they are asked to push someone from the edge of a tall building. Framed through Adam Alston's notion of 'productive participation' in immersive theatre (2016) as well as scholarship on reality television, *Pushed to the Edge* is analysed as a pedagogic intervention in the lives of the protagonists and the viewer. It solicits introspection from both audience categories, as protagonists report the rewards of their productive participation for the benefit of the viewers. To invite this critical reflection, the programme uses a range of strategies drawn from the conventions of reality television and performance magic to reassure viewers they need not be concerned with the ethics involved in constructing the event. In this way, Brown's feats engage directly and profoundly with viewers' experiences of the world around them, while retaining the opacity and mystery that characterises illusion.

As an overlooked presence within an already marginal performance form, the significance of televised magic bears some investigation. By considering this range of works, it is hoped that the flexibility of the form and the wide-ranging nature of its influences can be fully acknowledged. For now, the following chapter attempts to establish performance magic's significance in the processes of fiction and illusion that shape contemporary media culture.

2. Now you see it, now you don't: magic and media culture

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

-Arthur C. Clarke.

So reads the science fiction writer's 'Third Law' of prediction as it appears on page 39 of the 1974 edition of *Profiles of the Future*, a volume that laid out Clarke's techno-utopian vision of the future. Clarke's much-cited, though enigmatic, statement appears as a footnote at the end of a chapter, with no explanation offered. It is preceded by accounts of many instances in which scientists working on the best information available to them have failed to predict accurately how their innovations will impact the world in the future. It may therefore refer to the human habit of continually developing technology that we do not fully understand, or for which we cannot appreciate the implications. The place magic occupies in Clarke's formulation is beyond the everyday, pragmatic domains of rationality and logic; however, this thesis is concerned with magic and television, a technology that is familiar and intimate, if not entirely understood.

To be specific about what is meant by 'television' in this study: the title of this thesis playfully alludes to 'the box', a notion of television that somewhat nostalgically conjures a domestic and communal experience, the family circle gathered around the set in the living room, consulting the TV guide, surfing between channels. Alternately, as we saw in the previous chapter, the hypnotic qualities of 'the box' and the apparently passive relation it offers also renders it an object of ambivalence, as a phantasmic presence transmitting moving images that closely resembled 'real life' with an infantilising and domineering effect on the viewer's consciousness. It is clearly not accurate to insist that television must be a 'box' tied to a specific apparatus and imagined set of viewing habits. The period with which this thesis is concerned, the 1990s to the present day, saw a spreading of 'television' across multiple times and spaces with the development in on-demand and digital services, delivery to a range of smart devices, and the rise in Web television as content designed to be transmitted via the internet. 'Televised magic' could thus be defined in many ways, but the spectrality of 'the box' haunts this analysis. This is partly apparent in the fact that all the case study texts considered were at some point broadcast on mainstream commercial channels in Britain or the United States, including Channel 4, Watch, ABC and the Travel Channel. This understanding of television as a practice is connected to the notion of a determining influence of a closed system of commercial broadcasting that 'the box' seems to

represent, although thanks to on-demand and digital media this hegemony is no longer secure, in that the case texts were seemingly commissioned and produced to operate within this system. Television is also considered in this thesis as constituted through the unique relations it invites and produces, in an analysis to be further explored in section 2.3. Through their appeal to simultaneity and immediacy, programmes can produce affect and intimacy, or challenge viewers' ability to distinguish reality from fiction, or reassure viewers that they do in fact possess this ability. Situated in the domain of the private and domestic, television can reach into the everyday to *feel* real. It will thus be argued that performance magic is an especially visible site of connection between magic, technology, and everyday life.

This chapter discusses notions of remediation, fiction, and enchantment in order to place televised performance magic within a nexus of ideas that locates magic in the 'everyday', thus providing the theoretical background to this study. It begins by discussing televised magic as a remediated phenomenon, offering a framework for identifying its drive to authenticity and immediacy while still exploiting, even revelling in, its technological mediation. 'Street magic', a form developed for television, is introduced here to make those tensions clearer and provide some context for the ensuing chapters. The chapter then proceeds by highlighting a passage from During's study of performance magic that describes the form as 'a fiction of the real', arguing that televised magic can mobilise discourses of realness despite the performance event being separated spatially and temporally from its audience. The final section extends this argument, using literature on performance, visual culture, and reality television to explore the capacity for media technology to enchant, the role that such enchantments play in supporting or disrupting the established social order, and how audiences may engage with these seductive solicitations.

2.1 Televised magic as a remediated practice

To begin to unpack the notion of televised magic as a remediated practice, it is important to acknowledge the nuances of the term 'mediation' and the implications these nuances possess for the analysis of performance magic. It has been argued, for example, that *all* perception and communication is to a degree mediated, whether or not this mediation is facilitated by technology. This is the case according to sociologist Tia DeNora, who draws on the writings of Emile Durkheim to argue that culture provides 'categories' that 'structure what we come to count as reality' (59), giving us rules to 'make sense' of the world around us while also shaping internal

feelings and thoughts. She states, 'culture is the medium within which action, motive, ambition, desire, consciousness of the world and experience can be shared, exchanged and validated', while 'conventions, materials and languages that pre-exist and exist between us' help to 'broker the world' (37-8). In other words, culture mediates reality. This is not to say that cultural categories are fixed and stable; rather, DeNora notes that 'within cultures and across cultures there is variability in how realities are made manifest, and... even within a particular culture, the reality of a culturally mediated category is complex, mercurial, variegated in its day-to-day presentations' (67). Nor is it to say that reality can be instantiated by individual belief or pronouncement- that reality is simply whatever we say it is or wish it to be. Instead, DeNora charts the ways in which reality is negotiated, how the resources for defining reality are distributed, and how cultural categories require individual and collective validation to constitute reality. Reality emerges from her analysis as always inherently mediated by culture, as multiple, requiring maintenance, and contestable, a project always in the making.

A magic effect, specifically a vanishing coin effect, is one of the many case studies used by DeNora to map what she terms 'artful practice', namely the strategies and processes that we draw from culture to make sense of reality. She argues that performance magic is a form of 'artful practice', 'one that in this case is devoted to the business of deceit or rather to the induction of perception (and its byproduct, the production of deception) through carefully drawing together meanings, physical procedures, materials and movements in time' (117). The specific habits of thought and perception that the magician exploits are the audience's 'expectancies (e.g. if you are holding a coin in your hand I would see it; if you are holding a coin in your hand and put your hand palm down, the coin would fall to the ground)' and

our habit of focusing on what, in real time, seems like "important" information (you are waving your right hand around and my eyes are trained on that active hand; meanwhile I pay no attention to what your left hand is "doing" because it seems to me that there is nothing there to see). (115)

These habits of perception mediate how the audience directs its attention, and magicians are able to 'harness' (DeNora 116) these to perform misdirection. The notion that our sense of reality is culturally mediated will be valuable in the chapters to follow, since performance magic makes visible the contingency, contestability, and multiplicity of reality.

For example, in opening up the notion of mediation to describe the way in which perception can be harnessed or encultured, it is possible to recognise a range of mediating factors

at play in performance magic, such as the idea of 'persona'. For Andy Lavender, referring to David Blaine and Derren Brown, 'persona' constitutes a form of 'selective characterization' rather than a character as such, 'an *act* designed to create effect for the spectator, produced by a person with a biography' (119; 118). Lavender identifies the more 'indeterminate dramatic [figure]' of 'persona' as having emerged in postmodern performance from the notion of theatrical 'character', and so possessing particular resonance in the twenty-first century (106). The entertainment values of the magician's persona in particular 'depend on a negotiation between illusion and inauthenticity on the one hand, and transparency and actuality on the other', so producing an effect that Lavender terms 'the apparently-actual, clearly fabricated and palpably present', 'at the heart of the unresolvable tension between being a character and presenting a self' (115). The 'apparently-actual' walks the line between fiction and reality, between what the audience see and what they know to be possible, and between ordinary and extraordinary degrees of experience. Thus, the persona of the performer mediates the audience's expectations and perceptions of the performance.

Persona is also a way of arranging disparate ventures and products into a unified brand, such that it mediates consumer experience. Persona is a key resource in genres of reality television where individuals monetise their daily lives, of whom Kim Kardashian West is a prime example. As one interviewer observes, 'the continued viability of the Kim Kardashian West brand' depends upon her '[deploying] radical transparency about her life', and 'as a result, Kim is working wherever she is, whatever she happens to be doing, because being Kim is Kim's vocation' (Weaver). The expectation of 'radical transparency' was developed through the reality television vehicle *Keeping up with the Kardashians* (2007- present), where the dramas of Kim and her extended family's lives were played out for public consumption. In the language of marketing communications, Kim's development of her brand through social media has been termed 'parasocial interaction', which 'can create the illusory effect of actual social behavior and relationships' between the celebrity and their fans, although in reality this relationship is one-sided (Lueck 94). However, the fact that this intimacy is played out on social media and reality television, which purport to stage real life, means that media texts produced by and about Kim are ambiguous about her labour; she might equally be considered to be always working, or never working. As will be explored in the following chapters, Blaine, Dynamo, and Brown's personas are deployed in such a way that it is unclear where and how their performed aspects can be located. The personas of these magicians are mediated both in the sense that an

audience's perception of them is filtered through culture, and that they are produced and consumed through mediating technology.

DeNora's analysis is a useful reminder that it is not necessarily accurate to describe magic that occurs in a co-present encounter as 'unmediated', since all aspects of perception and communication are subject to cultural mediation. The notion of persona, for example, could be considered a mediating element that does not require a specific form of mediating technology to sustain it, although the above discussion shows that in practice such technology is often used in its crafting. Yet, there are clearly many differences between magic performed for a co-present audience who share the same space as the performer, and that which is recorded with the intention of being disseminated to another audience at a different space and time, and these differences are not captured by the notion of mediation as DeNora uses it. To resolve this ambiguity, a term is needed that alludes to the technological shifts between 'live' and televised performance magic without making the notions of 'media' and 'mediation' entirely dependent upon the involvement of technology. It can be found in Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's concept of 'remediation'.

'Remediation' is defined by Bolter and Grusin as 'the representation of one medium in another' (45), such that no medium disappears from history but becomes contained within another. For them, the notion of remediation has a double logic of both immediacy and hypermediacy. Immediacy 'names the viewer's feeling that the medium has disappeared and the objects are present to him, a feeling that his experience is therefore authentic', while hypermediacy is 'the experience that [the viewer] has in and of the presence of media; it is the insistence that the experience of the medium is itself an experience of the real' (70-1). The ideal state is for media experience to become seamless with non-media, so that the illusion of reality cannot be disentangled from reality itself: 'our culture wants to both multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them' (5). Thus, immediacy and hypermediacy 'are opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real', with 'real' defined 'in terms of the viewer's experience; it is that which would evoke an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response' (53). For Bolter and Grusin, the apparently conflicting imperatives of immediacy and hypermediacy can be reconciled through 'an appeal to authenticity of experience' that produces 'transparency', a completeness of experience whereby people become

‘both the subject and object of media’ (71; 231). In other words, the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy work together to produce what feels like a ‘real’ experience.

It may be argued that the transition of magic from a primarily live form to one increasingly experienced through the medium of television could be captured by the broader term ‘adaptation’. It is no doubt true that magic as a performance practice has adapted to survive and thrive within the pressures of media culture by developing new strategies with greater entertainment and commercial appeal within this environment. But introducing the concept of remediation articulates a particular adaptive strategy, that both captures a sense of the broader trend of magic as mediated performance and the specific media flows that occur within performers’ repertoires. As shall be discussed in Chapter 3, the status of David Blaine’s *Above the Below* (2003) vary between durational performance, live televisual broadcast, webcast and documentary video while retaining the sense that all these mediations capture the same simultaneous event. While remediation can be used in this expansive sense to describe a variety of dimensions of an event, it also helps to unpack the ways in which commercial television recontextualises other media to collapse them into a single cohesive text. In this thesis, sometimes this recontextualization appears as the reuse of footage from other televisual texts, sometimes as incorporating material from other media practices like home video or popular cinema. Remediation can thus be considered a strategy that has enabled magic to adapt and evolve as a practice, and the precedent for considering even the fundamental shift between ‘live’ performance and that which is technologically mediated can be found in theatre scholarship.

In applying the concept of remediation to theatre in order to consider theatre *as* a medium, rather than a form defined by the *absence* of mediation, Peter M. Boenisch notes that ‘[a]pplying [Bolter and Grusin’s] idea of mediation as a continued process of perpetual mutual remediation redraws completely the map of media history’, such that ‘rather than a linear line of evolutionary progress, media history resembles an ever extending spiral; each seemingly radical progress in media technological development turns out as yet another remediation’ (108). For Boenisch, if Bolter and Grusin’s claims are accepted, ‘this mutual process of remediation helps media users to switch to new media almost instantly’, with the forms and language of each new medium rendered legible by prior media encounters (107). Moreover, ‘all media users remember, activate, and apply their own experiences, knowledge, skills, prejudices, and backgrounds’, and ‘through connecting their observers to their cultural, discursive, and historic circumstances, the media *generate realities*- rather than *the reality*’ (109). This recalls Kember’s argument, discussed

in section 1.3, that magic performances paved the way for modes of reception in film audiences, further supporting the idea that audiences possess transferable competencies in media. Analysing how the National Theatre has incorporated mediating technology into its productions, Geoffrey Way argues that ‘the NT Live broadcasts remediate stage performances to bring them to larger audience, but as they do so they rely heavily on one of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s twin logics of remediation: immediacy’, ‘revealing in the process their reliance on established theatrical conventions recognizable to audiences to establish a sense of eventness’ (395). Meanwhile, the Schools’ Broadcasts produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company ‘[embrace] the hypermediated aspects of digital technologies to engage young audiences in the company’s work’ (Way 399), using digital media to encourage target audiences to participate in broadcasts through Q&A sessions and the RSC Education Twitter account. In their remediation of theatre, both Way’s case studies seek to retain a sense of the theatrical event that communicates theatre’s specificity as a medium. Boenisch and Way’s interpretations of remediation have important implications for the arguments to follow. In producing an understanding of live performance as a medium, it paves the way to understanding performance magic as *remediated*: undergoing a shift whereby one media form- in this case, performance magic- can retain its specificity if contained within a different medium, namely, the form of television. One creative direction facilitated by this remediation, and that particularly evidences its tensions, is the development of ‘street magic’.

According to Sexton, street magic ‘consists of a series of conjuring tricks that are performed in a public space without props or stage to a non-paying audience’ (‘Deception Reality’ 27). What Sexton’s definition does not include, but this study aims to show, is that street magic is mediated by the apparatus and discourses of television as well as conventions of ‘live’ practice. Street magic arguably remediates the practice of strolling or busking, namely performances by artists that intervene in the production of the public spatial order (Simpson 417). For Nick Wees, street performers or ‘buskers’ ‘can be understood as creative agents who operate within but against planned space’ (4), and their performances constitute a process ‘of working with the at hand’ (2). Rather than perform magic in a setting with connotations of fiction and illusion, like a theatre or television studio, street magic in its most recognisable iteration occurs in the public spaces of everyday life such as city centres, quiet neighbourhoods, bars and restaurants.

Where the audience in a theatre or television studio are assembled in one place specifically for the purpose of spectatorship, the dramatic conceit of street magic is that participants are encountered by chance, with passers-by who are not complicit in the effect being

accosted and drawn in to the performance. The terms 'participants' or 'spectators' as opposed to 'viewers', who watch the recorded and edited effect broadcast on television (or, in the twenty-first century, via DVD, on-demand services, illegal downloading, on laptops, mobile phones etc.) captures the difference between these two categories of audience, those who are shown on-screen and the implied viewer. The designation of real world spaces and the apparently improvisatory nature of their performances, as magicians spontaneously recruit their participants from passers-by, help to articulate the 'appeal to authenticity of experience', the sense that the medium has been erased, that is sought by mediating technology (Bolter and Grusin 71). Minimal rhetorical effort is made to establish the participants as 'real', only their appearance in the setting of the street implies the chance encounter. Perhaps the real-world setting is sufficient to denote authenticity for a television audience accustomed to factual television that purports to take place in the 'real world'. Alternatively, the decision to avoid stressing the 'realness' of the participants may have been taken to avoid the appearance of protesting too much. Either way, this use of 'real people' suggests that the events are taking place 'for real' and allows the viewer to feel they are participating in the effects. There is a drive to use the discourses of television to 'get past' representation and 'achieve the real' (Bolter and Grusin 53) in street magic.

The emergence of street magic is commonly attributed to David Blaine's 1997 television special *David Blaine: Street Magic* (Sexton, 'Deception Reality' 27). The programme makes heavy use of the reality-television trope of turning the camera on the participants, incorporating their reactions to his work into the programme. These reactions then become part of the entertainment. Reviews of the show hailed this as an innovation, with Penn Jillette of the magician duo Penn and Teller pointing to it as 'the biggest breakthrough done in our lifetime'. Yet Blaine saw himself as returning to an aspect of magic's heritage that had been neglected, stating in an interview that, 'I'd like to bring magic back to the place it used to be 100 years ago... I like the way Houdini brought magic to the people on the streets, genuinely' (Ryan). For both Houdini and Blaine, the desire to connect 'genuinely' with 'the people' was in fact enabled by a closed economic system of syndication. Houdini was 'discovered' in 1899 by Martin Beck, manager of the Orpheum Circuit chain of vaudeville theatres and cinemas, who offered him a trial booking and later a contract that 'vaulted [Houdini] to the top vaudeville theatres across the country' (Kasson 101). His straitjacket escapes in police stations and daredevil bridge jumps served to publicise his appearances in these theatres for paying audiences. Meanwhile, according to Blaine's autobiography, his decision to make a 'reality-TV magic show' as a venue for bringing

magic to 'the people on the streets' was facilitated by a million-dollar contract from the television network ABC (Blaine 96). Both these categories of events were, to some degree, announced in advance and financed by the popular entertainment industry. There is perhaps a tension between these apparently spontaneous, democratic, public events and their commercial imperatives, their 'appeal to authenticity' facilitated by the closed systems that mediate them.

This tension was not lost on Blaine's colleagues, who did not always hail Blaine as an innovator, nor praise *Street Magic*. The idea that magic had long been absent from 'the streets' and inaccessible to 'the people' before Blaine's arrival on the scene seems to have especially rankled with magician Jamy Ian Swiss, who argues in a 2007 online essay that street magic 'traditionally referred to magicians who made their living performing in public spaces and collecting money from the crowd'. According to his piece, this is a practice that should henceforth be referred to as 'busking' for clarity, since the term 'street magic' has been reduced to 'a label for a piece of the magic marketplace', a stylistic gimmick barely sustainable for amateur performers and not at all for professional ones. The development of street magic may thus be comparable to the popularity of *MTV Unplugged* recordings (1989- present), in which globally famous, stadium-filling pop and rock musicians perform on acoustic instruments. The stripped-down aesthetic of 'unplugged events' contrasts with the rest of MTV's programming, which included "mega-events" such as LiveAid, the merging of popular music and corporate sponsorship... and reality programming' (S. Jones 83). Despite the shared aesthetic of intimacy and immediacy, both street magic and the 'unplugged' phenomenon may represent a different type of globalised commercial offering, 'a label for a piece of the marketplace' rather than its antidote. The following passage details the crux of Swiss' arguments:

I propose that street magic does not exist in terms of performers. At least not for professional performers – because without a camera crew in tow, no one can make a living at this. I propose that street magic does not exist in terms of audience. Because without a camera crew, who wants to be accosted by strange adolescents threatening magic? I propose that street magic does not exist as a venue. I spoke with Jon Lovick, one of the bookers at the Magic Castle, which presents more than 350 magicians a year. When I asked him if he had ever seen a single act perform anything remotely like what is marketed as street magic – well, the answer is obvious, isn't it? I propose that street magic does not exist in terms of material. Because, when it comes right down to it, how much of the magic we see in the guise of television street-magic really exists? We will

never be told the actual shooting ratio of what quantity of tape is shot versus what amount makes it to air, but there is little doubt that, as time goes on, more and more of the magic we see on television actually does not exist at all.

For Swiss, the 'unreality' of street magic is an editorial strategy unacknowledged by the networks that commission the shows and the people involved in producing them, creating a fantasy that is doing the practice of performance magic more harm than good in several ways (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.). Among others, the hollowness of street magic's blatant commercial appeal; the 'lousy' props and falsely confident, unskilled performances it encourages; the unrealistic 'fantasy' of the urban environment where such effects are filmed (wryly noting that would-be performers must discover the hard way that 'pretty girls do not hang out in vacant lots – at least not the ones the average teenager really wants to meet'); and a lack of respect for mystery as demonstrated by the proliferation of YouTube videos claiming to reveal the secret behind whichever happens to be the hottest effect of the moment. This list of harms suggests that Swiss considers street magic to be an inadequate mimesis of busking that shallowly attempts to create authenticity. By his own reckoning, Swiss lists only five performers whom he considers able to make their living from street magic alone, with Derren Brown and David Blaine among them- a truly insignificant number compared with the hundreds working as buskers, table magicians, resident artists and corporate entertainers in cities such as London, New York and Las Vegas at any one time.

While Swiss's essay is helpful in articulating the tensions between performance magic as a 'live' practice and its newer, technologically mediated forms, this thesis aims to treat televised magic not as an inadequate rendering of live practice, but as a remediation of the form that opens up new possibilities. Indeed, the remediation of performance magic through both television and digital media has increased the reach and relevance of the form. For example, a huge global database of magic on digital video is available via YouTube. As well as footage of the aspiring street magicians of whom Swiss speaks so contemptuously, this database comprises promotional videos and clips uploaded by or on behalf of professional magicians, demonstrations of effects (often with a link to an e-book or DVD package for sale), excerpts from longer magic-based television specials or series, and fan videos compiled by users. In fairness to Swiss, some of these videos do apply the term 'magic' idiosyncratically, with the Vine films of Zach King in particular demonstrating the unstable status of the term ('Zach King Vine'). Working within the formal and technical constraints of Vine videos, which must be only six seconds long, King and his team use

editing to represent transformations and 'vanishes', such as turning a Rubix cube into colourful sweets, an unsuspecting human being sucked into a vacuum cleaner, or picking a real apple from a tree represented on a screensaver. The form in which these effects are delivered means that there is little mystery to them, since the videos clearly rely upon editing rather than physical or psychological method. Moreover, there is no spectator cueing us to react with amazement through *their* reaction, and therefore no on-screen point of reference to suggest that something truly inexplicable has taken place. King's videos, playful and creative as they are, are visual jokes meant to make us laugh, not leave us wondering. While these videos have been referenced as 'magic' by others, King states that he does not consider himself to be a magician and prefers the term 'digital sleight of hand' to describe his work (Vincent). This is perhaps evidence of the unruliness of terms associated with magic, rather than signalling an erosion of the form, as Swiss fears. In these videos, the practice of remediated magic is conflated with the recording and editing apparatus in a display of hypermediacy that draws attention to the means of its creation. In the case studies to follow, the tension between illusion occurring in real space and time before real people, and the apparatus and discourses of television that facilitates its dissemination to wider audiences, will be read as a productive one.

Even considering 'live' performance magic with a single co-present audience (itself a medium, as Boenisch reminds us), Swiss' notion that technologically mediated magic is alienated from conventional forms is contested by the fact that some of the most successful televised performers he names also develop stage shows, alongside their output of television shows and specials. Derren Brown has regularly toured the United Kingdom roughly every two years since 2003, each time with a new stage show, and has recently developed a production for a limited Broadway run. Dynamo embarked on his first UK tour in 2015 and an Australian tour in 2016, four years after the first series of his programme *Magician Impossible* aired. Nearly twenty years after first appearing on television, David Blaine undertook his first live tour in September 2014, heading to Singapore and Malaysia. In the first edition of *Liveness*, Philip Auslander questions the priority of recordings in popular rock music;

if rock is primarily a recorded music, why shouldn't the presence of the recordings on the radio and television suffice as a means of promoting them?... If rock fans are primarily engaged with recordings, what need does live performance fulfil for them?
(64)

For Auslander, this question can be approached by considering the discourse and ideology of 'authenticity' in rock. This 'authenticity' is deemed 'performative' by Auslander according to Judith Butler's understanding of the term, in that 'rock musicians achieve and maintain their effect of authenticity by continuously citing in their musical and performance styles the norms of authenticity for their particular rock subgenre and historical moment', norms that are subject to change along with 'changes in the prevailing discourse of authenticity' (72). Auslander's question could be asked of street magic performers in relation to Swiss' understanding of street magic as an 'unreal' phenomenon due to its basis in technological mediation. If street magic erodes conventions of performance magic to the point where spectators no longer care about the difference between 'live' and remediated magic, there would be no need to satisfy. Alternatively, it may be that the venue of the 'street' has become so appropriated by television, that the stage provides an alternative site for these performers to prove their skills, in which case the remediated form of magic precedes the 'live'. Either way, the skills, labour, and ingenuity needed for successful 'live' performances still needs to be connected in some way with these performers' brands, even if this is within a context determined primarily by media technology, so that street magic texts may be partially constituted by this connection.

Street magic can thus be argued to constitute a remediation of performance magic that nevertheless retains connections to 'live' practice. This thesis is not confined to considering 'street magic', though, as is demonstrated by Chapter 5, which is concerned with the work of Derren Brown. As well as remediating and redeploying the signifiers of 'live' performance, both Brown's work and the street magic programmes remediate content from other forms of popular culture, 'borrowing' in such a way that the primary medium- be it film, literature, etc.- 'has not been appropriated or quoted' (Bolter and Grusin 44), but nevertheless refashioning narratives, images, characters, and devices across different media forms. This is a feature of mainstream, franchised entertainment, examples of which include the *Harry Potter* novels (1997- 2007), later remediated as a series of films (2001- 2011) and a West End play set to transfer to Broadway, the incorporation of *Marvel Comics* (1939- present) superheroes into the Marvel Cinematic Universe (2008- present), and the *Resident Evil* films (2002- 2016) modelled on a Japanese video game series originally named *Biohazard* (1996- present). Televised performance magic likewise borrows heavily from existing cultural texts to situate it within a contemporary landscape of popular entertainment. A range of connections are present, from David Blaine's body performances that summon religious imagery, performance art and the secular fun of the carnival side-show, to

Derren Brown's drawing on popular cinema to stage a zombie apocalypse. Using the framework of remediation will help to unpack these connections and analyse them in the context of the twenty-first century. For During, the fully industrialised popular entertainment forms mentioned above constitute 'the commercial production and distribution of fictions', wherein secular magic survives in the modern age (27). It is time now to turn to the two types of fictional mode that During identifies as being produced and distributed within these cultural systems, which will be used as analytical tools for articulating the specific qualities of the fictions in televised performance magic.

2.2 Fictions of the real and true

The first mode During identifies is that of 'fictions of the *real*', illusions that 'simulate (rather than represent) reality non-linguistically, especially in magic shows' (58). The second are fictions 'of the *true*', which may be 'written, spoken, or mimed' (58). During refers directly to Coleridge's notion of the 'suspension of disbelief' in establishing fictions of the true, arguing that 'if it is supposed that conjuring can really raise ghosts, then this incident requires no suspension of disbelief' (57). In this instance, the degree of fictionality in the text is determined by the reader or viewer's 'attitudes to magic and the supernatural' (57). There is thus an element of subjectivity present in the idea of the 'true'. For a person who believes that the dead can be raised to communicate with the living, reading a novel that features a *séance* may reflect an aspect of their lived truth, whereas a sceptical person reading the same novel may understand this to be a purely fictional feature of the world represented.

On the other hand, fictions of the real are established through non-linguistic, perhaps visual and non-verbal means of communication that are presentational or performative. For During, they are, effectively, simulations of reality in its palpable, material sense, like those seen in a 'live' magic performance in which performers and audience share the same time and space, where the fictional aspects of the work are indistinguishable from the real. During remarks that

the will to engage fictions presupposes in readers or audiences an ability to recognize the conventions which separate fiction from non-fiction. This ability is challenged most by fictions of the real, in which it is particularly hard to disentangle the fictional from the real. (58)

It seems, for During, that when a spectator or reader encounters a fiction of the real, they are engaging in an experience that is not easily distinguishable from 'real', tangible, perceived reality, and the challenges of disentangling the fictional aspects of the encounter from reality could also be perceived and understood by others. Fictions of the real seek to simulate reality, where conventions that separate fiction from non-fiction are ambiguous or absent, suggesting an encounter where reality is determined by perception. The discourse of 'truth', on the other hand, emerges from an individual's beliefs and experiences prior to the encounter with the fiction. For During, performance magic 'fictionalizes by simulating reality rather than truth', appealing to a notion of shared, objective experience through perception rather than a personal 'truth' (61). Yet, as DeNora's work suggests, our sense of what constitutes material, tangible 'reality' is not only derived from sense-perception of the world around us (a perception that may, itself, be mediated, individuated, and encultured), but also from 'social, technological and cultural practices' that 'iron out the manifold, crumpled textures of things, by formulating them in terms of over-arching, general categories of things within the world' (24), and therefore also contains an element of personal 'truth' in its making. Although During is arguably too hasty in separating 'reality' and 'truth' so emphatically, a model of a fiction of the real that encompasses myriad sense-making practices allows an analysis of the illusionistic qualities of performance magic, that entertains by 'bringing [spectators] up against their own assumptions of how the world works' (Mangan xv). As this thesis shall discuss, 'fictions of the real' in performance magic are available even under remediated circumstances, when the performer and audience do not share the same material reality of space and time.

During imagines magic as a solely 'live' practice here, as is clear from his comments on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century genre of 'trick films', in which magic effects are performed using cinematic devices. George Méliès' *Escamotage d'une Dame chez Robert-Houdin*, discussed in section 1.3, is an example of this genre. During argues that magicians were challenged by film as '[it] was not a medium that could reproduce and disseminate those popular arts it was heir to without transforming them' (173). Moreover, as popular entertainment became increasingly mediatised, the 'magic assemblage' of rational and fairground recreation practices that all shared conjuring as a core skill-set 'metamorphosed into a modern entertainment industry based on technologies of reproduction such as records and films, marketed by industrially produced publicity techniques' (211). Yet there is an important distinction between media that represent magic effects within a narrative frame, and the technologically mediated texts to be

considered in this thesis, that 'create the appearance of inexplicable phenomena for entertainment purposes' (Landman 47).

The difference between media that represent magic and televised magic performances can be seen by looking more closely at an example of each; first, Neil Burger's film *The Illusionist* (2006). In this film, the stage magician Eisenheim (Edward Norton) enchants turn-of-the-century Vienna and resumes a relationship with Sophie (Jessica Biel), his aristocratic childhood sweetheart, until he makes an enemy of the Crown Prince Leopold (Rufus Sewell). Not only is Leopold engaged to Sophie, but he views Eisenheim's illusions as a political threat to the order of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. At a private court performance, Eisenheim refuses to confirm or deny Leopold's speculations about his methods and raises issues of royal legitimacy by performing an illusion that references the Sword in the Stone myth using the Prince's own sword, challenging members of the audience to move it from its fixed point on the stage. After Sophie's sudden death, Eisenheim develops a spiritualist act, performing séances that materialise souls in the image of the body they had in life, eventually summoning Sophie's spirit who accuses Leopold of her murder. In a confrontation with the chief of police Inspector Uhl (Paul Giamatti), who gathers evidence that seems to support this accusation, a drunken Leopold reveals that he is unable to cope with the pressure of succeeding the Emperor and finally shoots himself. The film ends with Eisenheim sending his papers to Uhl, who upon reading them realises that Sophie's death was faked so that the lovers could be reunited.

Fiction and reality are not easily distinguishable within the diegetic film-world of *The Illusionist*. In the final moments, it is revealed that the events of the film have been entirely masterminded by Eisenheim from his first meeting with Sophie thereon. He, not the ambitious but ineffectual Leopold, is the causal figure who imposes order on the world around him and ultimately supplies the rational explanations for events that are sought by Uhl. However, at other points in the story Burger teases the possibility that this film-world may admit supernatural happenings. The séance scenes, in particular the return of Sophie to accuse Leopold, underscore the possibility that the dead may really be summoned to communicate with the living. A mob appears at Eisenheim's door demanding to know the reality status of the séances, and even the pragmatic Uhl is uncertain, saying, 'I'm a cynical man, God knows... but if your manifestations are somehow real... then even I'm willing to admit, you're a very special person. And if it's a trick, then it's equally impressive. Either way, you have a gift.' The possibility that the séances might be real within the film-world is supported by the text's reference to spiritualism, a 'scientific' paradigm

that gained enough momentum in the nineteenth century to form a new religious movement. On the other hand, the idea that Eisenheim may be a charlatan wilfully deceiving his audiences is also raised, as this is the basis on which Leopold calls for his arrest. Eventually, but only under threat of arrest, Eisenheim publicly confirms to a gathered mob that he possesses no supernatural powers. Though he does not reveal how the spirits were conjured, it might involve a version of Pepper's Ghost. It seems significant that Eisenheim's approach of mystery and enchantment is presented in opposition to Leopold's ruthless project of rational disenchantment. This is a productive tension for the spectator Uhl, the audience's point of identification, who is ultimately able to appreciate both the 'reality' and the 'trick' as a 'gift'. In the film-world, the ambiguities of fiction and reality are used to create interest and suspense, invoking the pleasures of illusion.

Nevertheless, the difference between the illusions of cinema and the spectacle of magic effects is highlighted in the following extract from an interview with Neil Burger:

The film is already magic, cinema is magic. You know, the audience already knows how that trick is done. Editing techniques and CGI and digital effects and all that. So what I did really was try to do the illusions, the magic that's onscreen, as much as possible as they would've done it then and not use film effects... I mean we did all the magic effects in camera or practically on stage or mechanically or close to as they would've done them. And, you know, because of scheduling and budget, we were mostly successful, but you know, sometimes we had to use a few cinematic effects. ("Illusionist" Director Shows Real Magic')

This admission seems especially relevant to a sequence where we see Eisenheim performing in public for the first time, in which he causes an orange tree, complete with fruit, to grow before the audience from a seed. This can only be a reference to the Orange Tree illusion made famous by Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin, wherein a potted plant clockwork automaton would, on being wound up, sprout flowers and edible fruit. For the finale, 'a borrowed handkerchief appeared within one of the oranges... The fruit split into four sections as two butterflies came from nowhere to unfold the handkerchief into the air' (Christopher, 139). Though it may reference an effect that was achieved purely mechanically, any audience member with a working knowledge of what 'cinematic effects' look like will be able to identify that *The Illusionist's* version of the Orange Tree uses them. This may be for the logistical reasons of 'scheduling and budget' that Burger cites; it may also conceivably have been an aesthetic choice, because twenty-first century cinema cannot astonish audiences using the same techniques as nineteenth-century theatre. Burger here

appears just as unwilling as Eisenheim to reveal his mysterious methods, but is careful to indicate the film's fidelity to a theatrical past where such spectacles were achieved before an audience co-present in the space. However, he also admits that utter fidelity was not always possible, defining the limitations of analogue technology and sleight-of-hand skill in creating the effects, and thus avoids stretching his audience's credulity too far. It seems clear that the illusion is confined entirely to the film-world. In other words, the audience viewing *The Illusionist* is not to understand the spectacular magic effects that it represents as taking place in a real space or time. Abstracted from the discourses of the real that underpin notions of illusion, the Orange Tree effect of *The Illusionist* is not a simulation of reality in Düring's sense.

This is not the case with televised performance magic, as is evidenced by an example from *The Paul Daniels Show* (1979- 1994) of a 'water to wine' effect performed by Daniels. Like the early twentieth century televised 'spectaculars' discussed by Milbourne Christopher, the spatial and aesthetic regimes of *The Paul Daniels Show* tended to mimic those of stage illusions, with studio audiences separated from the performance zone through proscenium arch conventions. This anchoring of the technologically mediated event in 'live', co-present conditions, plus the following accompanying patter, suggests a desire to overcome television's capacity for illusion by insisting upon the 'reality' of the effect:

For example, just suppose- scientific stuff, this- that you wanted a glass of water- this'll impress you- you hold the glass like that, in the left hand, and in the right hand you take the jug of water. You tip it in an incline to the left. And you get- a glass of water. Not impressed, eh? Well, supposing you do it the other way around. You take the jug, like this, in the left hand and incline it to the right. You get a glass of wine... By the way, if you're confused at home, don't be. When I say "to the left", it's my left. So you get a jug of water, and a glass, and all you do is to tip it to the left. And then- now, that's got to be your left, OK- you get a glass of the old plonk. ('BBC 1 – "Paul Daniels Magic Show"')

The feigned concern over the confusion of the viewers 'at home' who are experiencing the televised version of the effect is functional in a practical sense, providing an excuse for Daniels to demonstrate the effect a certain number of times, in order to have enough tumblers of liquid to perform the next stage of the routine. However, the discussion of 'my left' and 'your left' use 'deictic expressions', that is, terms that describe the world 'relative to our own situatedness' within it (Marriott 8) to draw attention to the effect as an event that is taking place in real space and time, rather than the abstracted space and time of narrative fiction seen in *The Illusionist*.

Moreover, the use of deictic expressions draws attention to the difference between the experiences of the studio audience and the viewers, but insists that this difference is minor. Namely, that the discrepancy lies in the deictic understanding between left and right that is easier for the studio audience to follow, as they are co-present in the space with Daniels, than it is for the viewer. Despite this insistence, the differences between the experiences of the studio and 'at home' audiences will not manifest itself in deictic terms, as the studio audience (all of whom are seated facing Daniels) will also face the dilemma of 'your left' versus 'my left', so being equally party to the confusion that Daniels claims is occurring elsewhere. Highlighting this supposed deictic confusion could have a more strategic role to play in conflating the figures of the viewer and studio audience, and thus dealing with the challenges of remediation. In suggesting that misunderstanding the term 'my left' is the most significant difference between the experience of studio audience and viewers, Daniels' patter can be read as an attempt to close down the possibility that the studio audience may have access to aspects of the encounter that viewers do not. The script anticipates anxiety over remediation by insisting that it does not matter, that both categories of audience experience more or less the same encounter, regardless of whether they are watching in the studio or on television.

The magic effects represented in *The Illusionist* and performed in *The Paul Daniels Show* are doubly articulated; they are presented within a medium, be it film or television, that is already acknowledged and experienced as illusion. However, they take different strategies to respond to the capacity of these media to simulate 'reality'; the former by using the illusory ambiguities of a fictional, diegetic world for dramatic effect, and the latter by foregrounding aspects of the event's realness. In the chapters to follow, this thesis will argue that contemporary televised magic has developed its own distinct visual, thematic, and performative strategies for generating fictions of the real, that is, encounters in which fiction and reality are indistinguishable from each other. However, During's 'fiction of the real' relies upon an understanding of the 'real' that prioritises the physical and material. By opening out this definition of 'real' to encompass notions of belief and engagement, it can be argued that televised performance magic retains a distinct status as a practice that engages multiple realities, rather than collapsing into a more generalised assemblage of entertainments that represent illusion. The centrality of enchantment to modernity provides a key way of exploring how the notions of multiple realities, illusion, and belief may be engaged in everyday life, which is the site of the familiar yet unfathomable technology of television.

2.3 Everyday enchantments, the enchanted everyday

The works of such contemporary magicians as David Blaine, Dynamo, and Derren Brown reflect an everyday that is sometimes imagined, following Max Weber, to be 'disenchanted'. For Weber, this term describes a state of affairs brought about by 'science and by scientifically oriented technology', namely that 'there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather one can, in principle, master all things by calculation', 'the knowledge or belief that if one but wished one *could* learn it at any time' (139). According to the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, 'magic is dominant when control of the environment is weak', a result of 'a hiatus in [man's] knowledge or in his powers of practical control' (qtd. in Kasson 77). In this functionalist view, modernisation and, specifically, the technological progress of science, has attenuated the human need for religion and magic.

However, as Richard Jenkins argues, the term 'disenchanted' has two aspects; 'secularization and the decline of magic', and 'the increasing scale, scope, and power of the formal means-ends rationalities of science, bureaucracy, the law, and policy-making' (12). Contrary to Weber's thesis that modernisation involves the progressive disenchantment of the world, Jenkins argues that the twentieth century has seen a challenge to the 'empire of science'; as the "'objective" knowledges of Western sciences are becoming increasingly understood as (at best) contingent rather than permanent verities... the world may actually be becoming somewhat more mysterious, rather than less', in a shift towards 'greater epistemological pluralism' (18). In fact, '(re)enchantment must, perhaps, be recognized as an integral element of modernity', with such diverse practices as religious fundamentalism, psychoanalysis, tourism, advertising, science fiction, and the internet described by Jenkins as 'enchantments' (22; 19). Although Jenkins does not explore the nature or scope of these enchantments, it can perhaps be said that these cultural elements allow people to experience a dimension of the modern rational and sceptical world that allows them to dream, believe, and imagine a plurality of alternative possibilities.

This is the argument that Joshua Landy and Michael Saler advance in the introduction to their edited volume on secular re-enchantment. They argue that Weber 'neglected to mention... that each time religion reluctantly withdrew from a particular area of experience, a new, thoroughly secular strategy for re-enchantment cheerfully emerged to fill the void' ('Introduction' 1). Further, that enchantment is a crucial and strategic element of our 'messy' modernity

(‘Introduction’ 7) that is able to embrace ‘seeming contraries, such as rationality and wonder, secularism and faith’, that ‘delights but does not delude’ (‘Introduction’ 3). Enchantment, in other words, is not a separate realm from everyday life, but plays an integral role within it. Magic may be regarded as an especially unstable and shifting term in modernity, but this is not to suggest, as Jamy Ian Swiss does, that the term has been emptied of meaning. ‘Magic’ has specific associations in the historical present, demonstrating During’s argument that ‘channeled for the most part into show business and literature, [magic] survives in cultural forms that are engaged in the commercial production and distribution of fictions’ (27), enchanting forms with which people interact on an everyday basis.

Notions of enchantment in contemporary culture are not straightforward, but seem to offer two broadly defined critical possibilities; the sense of an illusory veneer that seduces and bedazzles, and everyday acts of transformation performed by ordinary people who create meaning from their environment. The ‘everyday’ as articulated by Henri Lefebvre resonates with the concept of illusion. The term ‘everyday’ is used to describe a specifically modern historical shift, rather than the notion of ‘daily life’ which, Chris Butler explains, ‘has a more timeless association with the habits of day-to-day existence’ (24). For Lefebvre, the everyday is a concept produced by the fragmentation and disconnection of function, form, and structure from ‘a complex “whole”’, in which even the smallest actions or objects are symbolically linked to the ‘immense values’ of concepts such as ‘divinity and humanity, power and wisdom, good and evil, happiness and misery, the perennial and the ephemeral’ (8). Lefebvre posits a ‘collapse’ of the ‘accepted moral and social references’ and symbols that made up these complex wholes, arguing that objects and actions have lost their symbolic capacity due to the advent of mass production (9). Instead, the connections of forms, functions, and structures are rendered visible such that the everyday ‘constitutes the platform upon which the bureaucratic society of controlled consumerism is erected’, remaining the ‘sole surviving common sense referent and point of reference’ (9). The everyday is applied as an expressly political concept, manifesting as the ‘common denominator of activities, locus and milieu of human functions’, including institutional systems such as the judiciary and police; it is repetitive and monotonous, so that every day seems the same as the one that preceded it, and also characterised by ‘an organised passivity’, so that people are faced with imperatives to consume and spectate in their leisure time and private life, and prevented from participating in meaningful decisions in their roles as workers (10). In

Lefebvre's understanding, 'everyday life' is a veneer, an illusion that naturalises the exposure of forms, functions, and structures of capitalist systems.

While Lefebvre's characterisation of the everyday is useful in suggesting a relationship between the rhythms of smaller activities and larger political movements, the deterministic framework offered by the essay does not seem to describe how people really make sense of the world they inhabit. Particularly, it is incommensurate with DeNora's understanding that making sense of everyday life is an accomplishment, in that 'the "everyday" is never "ordinary"', but is 'the site where the extraordinary achievement of "dwelling-in-the-world-with-others" is achieved' (131). In her reading, everyday life is not illusory, but is open to transformation and enchantment. There is a tension between these understandings of the everyday, as the site of illusion, also banality, fragmentation, and loss of meaning that pervades late capitalist modernity, and as the extraordinary locus of enchantment, where people resourcefully and artfully make sense of reality. The logics of these associations can be loosely traced in works that examine popular visual culture and entertainment as forms of secular magic.

In its emphasis on organisation and consumption and its claim that everyday life itself is an illusion, Lefebvre's concept of the everyday can be linked to the notion of 'glamour', which according to Stephen Gundle and Clino T. Castelli is at the heart of mass culture. For Gundle and Castelli,

Glamour was born at precisely the intersection of the victory of abstraction, rationality and money with the persistence at the heart of modernity of strongly irrational impulses, romantic currents, mystery and illusion. Glamour was magic, trickery and illusion which was harnessed to, while also disguising, the commercial imperative. (10-11)

Glamour is therefore an effect rather than an object or quality, and moreover one that only exists in the societies produced by late capitalism, so it sustains and is sustained by economic imperatives. The authors locate glamour as an urban phenomenon, facilitated in the nineteenth century by the building of arcades and department stores in cities and further enabled by the popularity of shopping as a leisure activity. Despite its apparent democracy, glamour is associated with specific visual effects derived from certain materials, such that the authors argue that 'it is possible to determine quite distinct currents within the language of glamour' (87). These glamorous materials and effects are seen in the cultural assemblage of texts that imagine 'the Orient' as a place of 'sex, violence, mystery and inferiority' to stimulate desire for cosmetics and

fashion (89), the association of gold with royal and religious pageantry and, in excess, with vulgarity of taste (99), and the colour red with 'upfront sexuality and heroic aura' (112). This points to another key condition for facilitating the rise of glamour, as well as urban development and an aspirational social class: namely, the circulation of images through media. In this understanding, glamour was a strategy to sustain desire for commodities which were becoming easier to obtain through mass production, and thus less inherently special or distinctive.

For Gundle and Castelli, glamour did not emerge as a spontaneous phenomenon, but rather a deliberate and organised one. The authors especially implicate Hollywood producers as the fathers of glamour, 'refugees who gave rise to an imagined America as a land of freedom, tolerance, wealth and personal realisation', arguing that these visionaries were responsible for producing the system of stars and idols in whom commodified spectacle was embodied completely (64). They describe glamour as a 'system', describing the conditions in which stars were produced, to capture the high level of organisation and consolidation in Hollywood that the authors claim took place during the second half of the 1920s (65). The aim of the 'system' 'was to mingle reality with illusion and fantasy to make quite ordinary people into fascinating ciphers of individual dreams and aspirations', so that the celebrity persona was seen as inseparable from the real person at its centre (69). This appears to concur with Landy and Saler's notion of enchantment as strategic and deliberate, central to the concerns of supposedly rational modernity by producing desire for commodities.

Indeed, the term 'glamour' itself has connotations of witchcraft and enchantment that is mediated through various degrees of technology. Gundle and Castelli note that roots of the word refer to both the 'grammar' or 'grimoire' of the Middle Ages, books that contained knowledge accessible only to a literate few and 'which were therefore held to be magical', and the illusory effects of this magical knowledge, 'bedazzlement, wonderment and deception' (4). While their main argument is that the visual aspect of glamour has primarily persisted in modernity as 'an enticing image, a staged and constructed version of reality that invites consumption' (8), it is important to note the aspect of the term that suggests a special and guarded knowledge that is mediated through the written word. This definition suggests that the apparent democracy of glamour as an effect, available to be accessed through the leisure activities of shopping and fashion, is supported by a secret discourse that ensures its enduring fascination. As Francesca Coppa notes, the notion of secret knowledge in magic tricks is 'constructed for the purpose of being repressed', used to structure the relationships of power between the performer, or

performers, and audience (89). Glamour could thus be said to be magical, not only in terms of its emphasis on visual illusion, but in the idea of secret and mediated knowledge.

Glamour, in Gundle and Castelli's understanding, is an endogenous force within capitalism, enchanting and seducing in order to sustain desire for the unequal and brutal systems of modernity. Here, enchantment does not disrupt modernity, but is integrated within it. This association of enchantment with purposeful delusion may be what informs Charles Rolfe's critique of magicians' tendency to evoke 'the agenda of enchantment' (577), discouraging their audience from '[thinking] about secret methods' in favour of '[experiencing] and [thinking] about effects' (583). For Rolfe, magicians seek to orientate their audiences towards the effect of the spectacle rather than its cause, effectively keeping them in ignorance. Yet Landy proposes that in a world returning to an enchanted state, performance magic offers audiences the opportunity to practice a 'detached credulity', 'the capacity to let oneself be deceived, knowingly and willingly', seeking enchantment as a state of mind to be deliberately entered into rather than a deception perpetrated upon an audience of suckers ('Modern Magic' 110). It may also be recalled from the previous chapter that Devant and Maskelyne actively sought to inform their audience of the ingenuity and skill of their effects, in the hope of creating audiences who could deeply appreciate the form of stage magic. Forms that invite a degree of reflexivity in their audiences, such as performance magic, may then be considered as '*training grounds for lucid self-delusion*, for the tenacious maintenance of fantasy in the face of facts' ('Modern Magic' 129), where spectators may experience the pleasures of illusion as fictions, delighted but not deluded (Landy and Saler, 'Introduction' 3). DeNora's notion that the 'artful practice' (117) of sense-making produces reality suggests this transformational dimension to everyday life, that tests the boundaries of what we perceive to be real, and in which people are active and complicit. This connects with Joseph Roach's understanding of the 'effigy' as a way of sustaining and fulfilling the desire for public intimacy through illusion, while still allowing audiences a degree of agency in co-creating the enchanting effect.

It is worth quoting from the passage in which Roach describes effigies and their function at length:

Their images circulate widely in the absence of their persons- a necessary condition of modern celebrity- but the tension between their widespread visibility and their actual remoteness creates an unfulfilled need in the hearts of the public. One aspect of this need manifests itself as a craving to communicate with the privately embodied source

of the aura, as in the “I and Thou” relationship imagined to exist between a praying supplicant and a god, in which the archaic “du form” of intimate second-person address allows the devout speaker to imagine a conversation with an abstract deity personified as if it had a body, a face, and a voice. To be efficacious, the “I and Thou” experience of It requires mental pictures and ideas, not reducible to any single one of the materially circulating images of the celebrity, but nevertheless generally available by association when summoned from the enchanted memories of those imagining themselves in communication with the special, spectral other. (17)

Effigies are the images that stand in for people craved by the public, allowing a particular form of intimacy to emerge that is enabled by the circulation of their images. They traverse various media, formed from the images and discourses surrounding celebrities that exist in the public sphere, regardless of the official or contested nature of this content. It is worth noting that this relationship between public figures and the public is not necessarily mutual, as fans do not need to offer their private selves up to an effigy for this relationship to exist.

Instead, like the audience of a magic effect, fans and consumers have an active role to play within the illusion of the effigy. In performance magic, the audience legitimate the trick, entering into a contract of ‘co-operative deceit’, B. Keith Murphy’s phrase that signals a need for the magician and spectator to share the same communicative frame (87). According to Murphy’s model, if the magician can be regarded as the sender, the spectator the receiver, and the symbol the meaning of the illusion, the success of a magic trick ‘depends upon the intent of the sender and requires the receiver to recognize the sender’s intent for the utterance (symbol) to have meaning’ (89). The ‘receiver’ plays a crucial part in activating the meaning of the symbol, so that neither magic nor the effigy exist without the consent and participation of the spectator. They need to be aware that they are witnessing a magic effect, that the performer’s intention is to deceive them. Likewise, the effigy is not simply produced by a corporation or brand launching it into the public sphere, but through collective belief and need, requiring an audience that is prepared to play along. Effigies, along with the media practices that produce them, may be a practice of everyday life that mediates between everyday experience and broader popular culture in a relationship of ‘co-operative deceit’.

In the current age of digital media, it is especially apparent that effigies are sustained by their audience’s active participation and consumption. For Elizabeth Ellcessor, Internet celebrity is characterised by ‘illusions of intimacy, expressed... through perceived access to private,

backstage behavior. Internet-based fame depends on the authenticity of a star's self-representation and on the notion of intimacy, experienced through the possibility of interaction rather than through simple familiarity' (51). Although a star may have become famous for their labour in any medium, the 'possibility of interaction' is the means through which internet-based intimacy is achieved. The assumption that the effigy is continuous with a real human being facilitates the illusion, in much the same way that a participant in a magic effect assumes that the act of signing a playing card is one of authentication, a guarantee that it will be this very card that will impossibly reappear after being vanished. The attachment of a name and image to an online persona works like the signature, announcing that the persona corresponds to a real-life presence. On Twitter, for example, an official avatar deploys the face and name of a celebrity, is authorised to *be* the celebrity on this platform, but the account may be managed by a team of people responsible for communications or public relations. Those who 'follow' the account may behave as though there is continuity between the Twitter-self and real-life self, both 'mentioning' the Twitter account and addressing it directly, sustaining the impression that they might be conversing with a person that exists somewhere outside the internet. The everyday media practices of the 'followers' facilitate the reality of the effigy.

There is an ambivalence about effigies that is produced by individual and collective need, and so they may not be stable or singular objects. Rather than worship or preservation, that might be suggested by the term 'icon', effigies invite acts of violation and destruction through their capacity to stand in for another object or body. Indeed, despite the best efforts of public relations strategies and authorised channels of communication, once effigies take hold in the public sphere, they can disrupt 'official' narratives. One example is the conspiracy theories surrounding the birth nationality of former US president Barack Obama, which emerged in 2004 and were amplified by both individual Republican supporters and conservative media outlets during the 2008 election in the so-called 'birther' movement. 'Birthers' demanded that the details of Obama's birth certificate be made public, believing that this would demonstrate that he was born outside the United States, and was therefore ineligible to run for office. After his election, a report by the Southern Poverty Law Center comments that 'a so-called "American Grand Jury" [issued] an "indictment" of Barack Obama for fraud and treason because he wasn't born in the United States and is illegally occupying the office of president [sic]', while 'other sham "grand juries" around the country follow suit' (Keller 5). This fuelled a paranoid idea of a deviant, Other body occupying the historically white position of President of the United States, an aspect of Obama's effigy that has

never wholly dissipated. A photograph of Obama's birth certificate was circulated in an attempt to dispel the effigy through objective proof; yet this move ended up sustaining it, as discussion questioned the authenticity of the documentation. A CNN poll published in 2015 suggests the continuing prevalence of 'birther' beliefs, finding that the number of US citizens who believed Obama was born abroad had remained stable at around twenty percent since 2010 (Agiesta). All this suggests that many types of media discourse surrounding effigies serve to make them more powerful in the public consciousness, whether the attention be positive or negative, officially sanctioned or based only on a rumour.

Gundle and Castelli and Roach's accounts of how enchantment structures everyday life, offering multiple levels of reality, are both seductive in their own ways, but like Lefebvre and DeNora's theories of the everyday, placing them alongside each other causes a productive tension to emerge. Can it be said that people are under a spell, surrendering to a system of modern enchantments, or are they active in animating the world around them by making their own magic? Televised magic exploits the uncertainty of the everyday in its representations of 'the real', and, as will become apparent in later chapters, the works to be considered in this study seem to imagine the relationship between magic and everyday life differently. In some cases, the apparent position underpinning televised magic effects is that they reveal the illusory nature of everyday life, and in others, that they summon a realm of dream and fantasy that offers a break from reality.

As a medium, television enables this ambiguity. As Nick Couldry notes following Roger Silverstone, media are always 'at least doubly articulated, as both transmission technology and representational content', such that there is no single way of theorising 'media' in relation to the social order and lived experience (375). In the specific case of televised magic, the transmission technology can become conflated with the representational content so that the presence of illusion becomes difficult to detect. In these texts, the production apparatus of television is not framed as a device that records an objective and shared 'real world', but as a technology that can act as a confederate in the magic trick, with the capacity to create spectacle, engage audiences, and remediate the real. Televised magic is thus different from other media texts because it is doubly articulated as illusion, because of the mediating technology that produces it and because of its content. To create an effective illusion, these texts must also be deeply invested in the creation of multiple levels of reality.

Roger Silverstone argues that media systems are 'central' to the 'reflective project' of modernity and postmodernity that is concerned with finding out about the nature of reality as the 'world around us',

not just in the socially conscious narratives of soap opera, day-time chat shows or radio phone-in, but also in news and current affairs, and in advertising, as through the multiple lenses of written, audio and audiovisual texts, the world about us is displayed and performed: iteratively and interminably. (7)

Technologically mediated environments in Silverstone's understanding may be 'increasingly insistent and intense' (1), but they are not even, smooth, or unidirectional; rather, the scale and reach of mass communication forms part of 'the general texture of experience' (4). While audiences are a resource for television, in so far as they represent commodities for advertisers, television is also a resource for audiences 'to help process and organize our own experiences, and to mediate between the horizons of our everyday world and those which lie beyond our immediate reality' (Dahlgren 43). Peter Dahlgren adds a note of caution to Silverstone's analysis, suggesting that while people 'still [derive] an important sense of cultural anchoring and orientation' from television, recent developments such as the increase in output and intertextuality 'may mean that the television-based symbolic universes which reverberate among audiences are both more plural than previously... and perhaps more kaleidoscopic in character' (43). It is therefore important, when analysing television, to situate it not within 'an hermetically sealed, media-driven social system', but 'as intricately woven into mutual reciprocity with an array of other political, economic and sociocultural fields' (44). Dahlgren later draws upon Habermas' concept of the 'lifeworld' to reinforce the argument that mediation, while a dominant force, must not be understood to be the sole determining feature in social and cultural life. This notion of a reflexive television that is dominant, but not overdeterministic, is important in facilitating a type of enchantment that 'delights, but does not delude' (Landy and Saler, 'Introduction' 3) and that offers viewers a means of formulating and interpreting their real, lived experiences.

As a technology situated in the domestic, intimate realm, television is linked with the everyday and with notions of real life. In *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy* (2008), Misha Kavka notes that following the critiques of the Frankfurt school, mass culture has often been imagined as entailing an alienation of real experience and emotion following an over-saturation of media (6). However, she argues that 'it does not follow that, just because we may be moved by images on screen, we are no longer capable of being moved by the lived world' (6). For Kavka,

reality television derives its relationship to reality from its capacity to produce feeling; rather than affirming the distinction between media and reality, she argues for their intermingling by suggesting that 'feeling... operates like sonar for traces of the real within media (re)presentations' (4). Kavka points to the ways in which television as a technology of presence and intimacy can be a resource for experience, arguing for its capacity to 're-move' the viewer, in the sense of being emotionally moved again through representation, rather than evacuating affect or uselessly rousing it (6). As such, television can be a resource for what she terms a 'social reality' that sits alongside 'that which is material', such that reality can be defined as "'the world around us" (in which "I" act) or "lived experience"', existing on multiple material and symbolic levels (2). In a similar vein, Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood found in an empirical study of television audiences that viewers of reality television 'look through' the transformation of real people and their experiences into symbolic form, their representation as heroes and villains or performance of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, reaching for points of connection to evoke a 'presence' in the text independently of the values it espouses (147). These viewers reject the signification of the reality television text in their reactions, operating instead at the 'level of significance' and affect, or of 'mattering' rather than 'meaning' in Kavka's terms (*Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy* 148). While viewers possess a 'working knowledge' that enables them to recognise the fictional aspects of television (Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy* 3), it produces real affective responses, and is used by people as a resource to build and interpret their social realities.

This does not necessarily mean that fictions and realities merge together in the consciousness of the viewer to become indistinguishable, but it does perhaps produce an ambiguity or tension regarding reality upon which televised performance magic can capitalise, and in which the viewer can invest varying and shifting degrees of belief or scepticism. The idea of a social reality partially produced by engagement with television is important for this study, because it suggests a way for street magic to engage with reality, without the need to 'simulate' it materially according to During's conception of performance magic. There are some commonalities between the act of 'looking through' and operating at the 'level of significance' and Landy's idea of re-enchantment as a position of 'detached credulity' ('Modern Magic' 110). These television texts can be seen as a resource for experience, offering viewers a way of making sense of the world around them, that entertains without demanding belief. Television shapes an environment in which viewers can move between positions of belief and scepticism without needing to commit to one or the other.

Where viewers do choose to adopt a position of scepticism, this can be articulated as Mark Andrejevic's notion of 'savviness' regarding reality television. Andrejevic describes reality television as rehearsing late capitalism in psychoanalytic terms; capitalism becomes uncanny when programme franchises such as *Survivor* (1997- present) and *Big Brother* (2000- present) reveal the falseness of the promises of true democratic participation, or even mere interactivity, that are offered by the systems of production responsible for creating them. Through the failures of the shows to make good on this promise, it is demonstrated to be an empty one, thus exposing the contrived reality of late capitalism's naturalised social and symbolic order, of which the shows are framed as a microcosm. The uncanny effect is caused when these orders persist even when they are revealed to be illusory. The progressive, even revolutionary potential of the recognition of the illusory structures of capitalism is lost in what Andrejevic describes as a 'savvy' attitude, 'a complacent "knowing" that takes pleasure in not having any illusions about society' (178). In his analysis, the savvy viewer is aware that 'behind every promise of truth or authenticity [lies] the reality of an illusion' (132) and refuses to be duped by assurances that all is as it seems.

Savviness as it is described by Andrejevic is not a private matter but contains elements of performance, wherein savvy statements declared by the subject determine their place in a social hierarchy. Andrejevic describes its manifestation in chat rooms for fans of the aforementioned reality television shows, who evaluate participants' strategies for winning the game and discuss (for example) how producers could maximise the entertainment value of the shows by creating more conflict. It seems important to disclose oneself as savvy to others, to share in mutual savviness or act as a source of information for naïve 'dupes', perhaps as a way of regulating status or group dynamics. These performed elements of savviness can be traced in Annette Hill's concept of multimodal responses to paranormal entertainment, even if Hill's model allows for more nuanced positions than 'savvy' or 'dupe' (75). She argues that while watching shows such as *Most Haunted* (2002- present), audiences move through a 'revolving door' of discursive positions such as paranormal sceptic, media critic, and emotional expert, constructing these identities in relation to belief and disbelief (Hill 79-80). The 'revolving door' is visible in the 'avowal' or profession of one's position; audiences have to speak up and declare themselves as believers or sceptics in each case. The Channel 4 programme *Gogglebox* (2013- present) could be read as a commercialisation of this imperative towards performed savviness, as participants gather in family or friendship groups, and are filmed watching and discussing highlights from the week's television schedule. Many of these conversations are about identifying the narratives and underlying ideologies of the

texts with which they are presented, and evaluating or resisting them. By way of example, this is a range of *Gogglebox* responses to a news item regarding alleged media mistreatment of Prince Harry's partner, the actor Meghan Markle:

A) That is not news, that is an intrusion of privacy.

B) I think he's really cheeky, issuing a "proclamation", you know, like to say, "keep away from my girlfriend", you know as far as I'm concerned, it's game on!

C) You know what's happened, don't you? The girlfriend has said, "Why are you not defending my honour?" and now he's gone in and defended her honour.

D) I find it fascinating, I'm the first person to read the headlines, I lap it all up.
(*Gogglebox*, 2016)

These discursive reactions display knowledge about the media apparatus and critique its role in determining issues of public interest (A and B), challenge the narrative of the story by constructing Prince Harry as comically uxorious rather than a gallant rescuer (C), and self-deprecatingly acknowledge the participant's own complicity in consuming these stories (D). They all share the detached perspective of the savvy viewer, questioning and challenging media narratives in order to shore up their savvy identities. Yet there is no space in *Gogglebox* for participants to acknowledge or work through their own status as performers, as their role is solely to perform this savviness in relation to the media texts with which they are presented. They do not, for example, acknowledge the presence of the television apparatus in their home by looking at the camera, instead fixing their gazes at the television set or at each other. This sustains a fiction of unmediation that allows viewers to feel that the participants of *Gogglebox* are just being themselves, talking and behaving exactly as they would if no camera were present, and as a result is perhaps the most cynically savvy element of the whole programme.

Savviness is significant in relation to televised performance magic, because it essentially derives from the belief that the events represented in television texts have been faked. How can such texts move away from the binary of 'real' and 'fake' upon which savviness is built, and towards a notion of (re)enchantment that 'delights' without 'deluding' (Landy and Saler, 'Introduction' 3)? As shall be discussed in later chapters, in some instances televised magic programmes specifically address the savvy viewer, developing various strategies to anticipate and foreclose accusations of fakery. The doubly articulated illusions of television make it harder to discern the real from the fictional in magic, which allows the viewer to adopt multiple and shifting

positions, sometimes consciously or unconsciously submitting to the pleasures of illusion, sometimes reflexively defending themselves against it, sometimes believing and sometimes sceptical. Although this thesis is not concerned with capturing empirical audience responses, part of the work of analysing the television texts will be to determine what kind of response they solicit from the audience, the engagements they make space for and those they attempt to forestall.

This chapter has considered televised magic as a remediated form, that simulates multiple levels of reality according to the conventions and affordances of its medium, and equally a range of possible engagements for the viewer. The case studies that follow further engage with the notion of televised magic as a set of flexible practices driven by the persona of the performer, the affordances of television as a form, and the degree of reality in which the work is invested. The following chapter examines David Blaine's work as it resources real places and people to produce media texts that stage extraordinary feats in the settings of everyday life. Blaine's street magic specials and endurance stunts play with the boundaries of concepts of fictional and real, staged and authentic, and in some cases revealing their limits.

3. 'Real or magic?': entertainment, enchantment, and the everyday in the works of David Blaine

*'Just give me a quarter', says David Blaine, who stands among a group of three young black women next to a crossing on a busy urban street. It's daylight, traffic goes by and a GAP store is visible in the background. It could be anywhere in the developed world. Blaine wears 'street clothes' - a khaki T-shirt that subtly draws attention to his developed musculature, and black trousers. The effect is shot with a single handheld camera that pans wobbily around the group and zooms in on whoever happens to be speaking. While one woman reaches for a coin, he continues, 'You know how people can change the consistency of metals?' The group respond with surprised exclamations- 'No?' 'What?' 'Change what?' Blaine takes the coin in his hand, with an odd flourish- maybe to disguise a switch between the real coin and the fake one?- and explains, 'Change consistency, like if you squeeze a piece of metal it heats up. That's obvious.' There is some tentative agreement. 'But look, watch', Blaine commands, and the camera zooms in on the coin held before his face at chin level, between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. Blaine brings the coin to his mouth, looks directly into the camera for a second, before intensely- almost fiercely- holding the gaze of the woman closest to him and biting a piece out of it. The camera follows the woman as she screams and runs in a circle around Blaine to re-join the other spectators, seeming delighted by the spectacle while unnerved at being singled out. Blaine keeps his distance from her, mumbling his next command to 'look, watch' as though his mouth is full. He spits- although the camera is tight on his face, the composition of the shot is such that you can definitely see something flying through the air- and suddenly the coin is whole again. This is the last point in the sequence at which we see Blaine, as the camera again follows the women while they laugh and clap joyously. The woman with whom Blaine made eye contact says, 'I'm going home!', but not before explaining to a bystander what she has just witnessed, 'He bit the quarter **off**, and said- **whistling noise**- and it went back together. In front of my face!' Another woman, heavily pregnant, declares, 'I'm going to have my baby right here.' Though the effect itself is fun to watch, I feel like I am sharing in the emotions of the women as they move from amused apprehension to cracking jokes and almost dancing with delight. My gaze is triangulated, as I watch them watching Blaine. (From the author's notes on *Street Magic*)*

The previous chapter noted that David Blaine's 1997 special *Street Magic* has been credited with naming a new genre of televised magic. In 'Deception Reality', Sexton identifies certain conventions of street magic that build 'a visual rhetoric of liveness' (30), making use of the indeterminacy of fiction and reality afforded by television that can be seen in the opening effect of *Street Magic*, described above. The type of effects performed in Blaine's street magic shows are close-up magic, as well as 'larger events' (27) including levitations and other bodily feats. Regardless of scale, the shows are coded as an 'unrehearsed spectacle in a public space, in which the complicated machinery of the theatre illusion will be absent' (27), a claim corroborated by the location of the effect on a busy sidewalk. Further tropes of street magic include the 'showcasing' of ordinary people, 'in fact, the more ordinary they appear the better, to help create a sense of the opposite of celebrity glamour, fashion, and excess', while the eschewing of a studio space in favour of filming in real places, low production costs, and lack of a built set contribute to a staging that communicates authenticity, unpredictability, and reality (28), elements that are all present in the above account. It seems that Blaine has interrupted the spectators as they are on their way elsewhere, adding to the sense of spontaneity and authenticity that suggests the trick takes place in a real space.

The 'rhetoric of liveness' seen in Blaine's street magic is achieved partially through television's capacity to disguise and downplay its interventions. As John Ellis writes of televisual witnessing, the 'superabundance' of detail in audio-visual images

[brings] us into contact with individuals, crowds, actions and events, and this contact feels to a significant degree to be unmediated by other humans, however much they may have manipulated the footage... There is always more detail than is needed by the narrative; always more present in the image than is picked out by the commentary; always more to be heard than the foregrounded sounds. (12)

This 'feeling of unmediation' (Ellis 12), caused by the camera indiscriminately picking up everything in its path, creates a sense of immediacy that is carefully managed throughout Blaine's television performances (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.). As Lamont and Wiseman note, magicians manage co-present encounters with audiences through complex physical and psychological processes of misdirection, controlling their attention so that they do not perceive methods behind effects. In televised performances, this work is effectively performed- as far as the viewer is concerned- through the camera, so that the magic and mediating apparatus may be conflated in the viewer's imagination. The mediated encounter can be managed firstly at the site

of shooting itself with selective filming practices and the use of confederates, and secondly during the postproduction process. The control of the performer in the mediated encounter is thus absolute: though the contact may 'feel' unmediated, the gaze of the audience is ultimately directed by the camera (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.). This point is underscored in interviews with those who have worked on Blaine's shows in an editorial capacity. Dave Marcus, who edited the 2013 special *Real or Magic?*, emphasises that audiences are aware that the choppy visual grammar of street magic shows, typically employing many cuts and cameras shooting from multiple angles, can be used to misdirect them so as to hide the method. These techniques highlight the experiential gap between the co-present spectator and the viewer, 'so the direction was to use as few cuts as possible so the television viewing audience is witnessing exactly what the celebrities and street subjects were witnessing', and to use one camera 'since the moment you cutaway is the moment the audience may wonder what actually happened in realtime between the two cuts' (Altman). These choices reflect the desire to simulate authenticity through unobtrusive camerawork that mimics uninterrupted gazing as closely as possible. They are strategies to communicate authenticity and spontaneity, that ground the fictions of the magic tricks in real time and space, while also seeking to provoke delight and astonishment in the viewer.

Blaine's televised magic is framed as a radical intervention in the everyday that creates marvels among real people and in real places. Hence, the first two sections of this chapter argue that these are devices to ground the fictions of *Street Magic* and *Magic Man* (1998) in a semblance of reality and exploring the strategies used to stress their 'realness'. That street magic is adapted for a particular vision of urban life is apparent when the works depart from these conventions, using celebrities as participants and shooting in 'exotic' locations. At these times, the performed character of the famous person and the alterity of the location and its population seem to require a re-negotiation of the levels of reality and fiction at play in Blaine's effects. On the other hand, the stunts and endurance feats that Blaine performs apparently rely on the extraordinary qualities of Blaine's body without a hidden method in operation. These spectacles often attempt to engage televisual strategies of communicating reality while remaining attached to modes of fiction. The endurance feats *Above the Below* (2003) and *Dive of Death* (2008) mirror trends in reality television and are remediated into documentaries, creating an uneasy tension between multiple levels of reality.

3.1 Real people as media content

In *Street Magic* and *Magic Man*, the audience of spectators is assembled from passers-by apparently encountered by chance. The choice to place ordinary people at the centre of the text effectively means that the audience of street magic can be located in two ways; the spectators who are co-present with the performer, and the viewers who are watching a screen. In this, the early street magic specials follow a general contemporary trend in media culture identified by Graeme Turner as the 'demotic turn', in which 'ordinary people, or aspects of their everyday lives, are transformed into media content' (171). The term 'demotic' can be applied to much current popular television. However, where reality television shows like *Big Brother* intensely scrutinise their cast or talk shows such as *Jerry Springer* (1991- present) and *Jeremy Kyle* (2005- present) unpick complex domestic histories for the audience to judge, the personalities, histories, talents, and individuality of the 'ordinary' spectators in Blaine's street magic are not emphasised at all. One active role in the shows they play in the shows is to facilitate the magic, for example to select a card and memorise it, or as Blaine commands repeatedly throughout the shows, to 'watch'. Another purpose, though, is to indicate the reality of the encounter to the viewer, and thus confirm that an extraordinary effect has taken place. This strategy helps to avoid the issues of Zach King's Vine videos, discussed in section 2.1 of the previous chapter. The presence of a spectator differentiates the magic effect from a prank, con, or joke, meaning that viewers can verify that the effect they have just witnessed is truly astonishing. Whilst close-up magic had been performed in public places to a non-paying audience prior to Blaine's television debut, these texts incorporated the reactions of the spectators into the show. The dramatic conceit of street magic is that these spectators are dealing with a temporary, unexpected interruption to their everyday lives, while the viewers experience both the effects and the spectators' reactions as mediated entertainment.

The levitation illusion that constitutes the climactic moment of *Street Magic* illustrates the role that spectators play in grounding the magic effects in the everyday. In this segment, Blaine appears to levitate about two feet above the pavement, unsupported and in broad daylight. The spectators' role here is all the more important because the method behind this illusion seems to be a combination of classic stage magic technique and selective use of footage.

One anonymous Internet commentator explains that Blaine is performing a Balducci levitation, in which he positions his body relative to spectators such that by lifting one foot slightly,

he appears to be levitating an inch or so from the pavement. Having captured the desired reaction from several groups of spectators, the effect is shot again with the use of wires and a harness, producing a more dramatic levitation effect. 'What Blaine did was a camera trick- known as a post-production edit. The audience at home watched the second (wire suspension) levitation performance, with the real levitation edited in' ('David Blaine's Magic Tricks Revealed!'). This is conceivably possible, since a full view of the levitation and the spectators are never contained within the same shot. The viewer follows the sequence of events as though both they and the on-screen spectator are observing the same event, with the spectators' reactions seeming to confirm that something out of the ordinary, a break with the everyday, is taking place. As well as the mediating apparatus of television, the magic effect is thus mediated through the reactions of spectators.

The repetition of the effect allows multiple groups of spectators to be incorporated into the text, affording the viewer more material with which to judge the reality of the levitation. The levitation is repeated four times in the programme, for four markedly different sets of spectators: the Dallas Cowboys football team outside their home stadium; punk rockers hanging out outside a body modification studio in San Francisco; female holiday-makers on the Atlantic City boardwalk; women going about their business in Times Square. In two of these instances, Blaine builds anticipation by getting into position, shaking his head and declaring that he is unsure if he'll be able to 'get off'. Despite their differences, during the sequence of levitations, the spectators all display similar levels of highly kinetic, incredulous reactions. They become doubled over with laughter, clapping their hands to their faces with shock, exclaiming their disbelief loudly and repeatedly to each other, even physically running away from Blaine. As well as capturing the reaction to the effect itself, each effect is often followed by the spectator speaking to camera, describing what they have just seen and offering a possible explanation for it, according to their own understanding of the encounter and their larger world view. At the end of the levitation illusion, a white female spectator articulates her impression that Blaine must possess supernatural capabilities:

I think it's like, you just get a gut feeling, cause I've read up on this stuff, some of it, and it's just like, he just came back and I was like 'You alright?' and he was like 'Fine'... I guess he's very gifted, to me, like, spiritually, very gifted, but like I think, meditation-wise, he really like- he can do it. I mean that was unbelievable, there's like no strings

attached, and he just all of a sudden came up off the ground and came back down and it was like- that's just- wow.

In her amazement, this spectator is reaching for an explanation that is congruent with her own world view. The broken qualities of her speech seem breathless rather than hesitant, as though she is attempting then and there to reconcile the impossible event she has just witnessed with what she knows to be possible. Through this, the viewer is encouraged to believe that she genuinely has witnessed something she finds difficult to explain in ordinary terms. Yet by including this account, the text also makes available a greater range of positions related to belief or scepticism. Some viewers may take issue with her explanation of the event, and believe that this affects her credibility as a witness. Perhaps others might agree with her that spiritual feats of levitation are possible, but also believe that this is not what has occurred in the programme. As the spectator, who viewers are to accept is a 'real' person rather than a confederate, narrates her experience for the benefit of the viewer, this can be read as a moment that opens up the possibility for a range of believing or sceptical engagements.

Candid camera television programmes and the newer media form of the reaction video provide useful models with which to understand the function of the pro-filmic spectator in Blaine's street magic shows. According to Kavka, candid camera television represents 'the small crisis', an event that disrupts participants' understanding of their environment (*Reality TV* 17). In her analysis of Allen Funt's *Candid Camera* (1948- 2014), 'people find themselves in familiar, "normal" settings that are made somehow strange or abnormal' (*Reality TV* 17). In such shows, humour is derived from people attempting to deal with ridiculous or outlandish situations in their everyday lives, who are then praised as 'good sports' for allowing their mildly humiliating experiences to be broadcast for the entertainment of others. Reaction videos, on the other hand, consist of footage that captures people watching 'live' and co-present or technologically mediated events, often disseminated through social or digital media, and trade on affects of shock or surprise. One *New York Times* article accounts for the pleasures of reaction videos in terms of postmodern loss, describing them as 'a social periscope' and claiming that 'in a culture defined by knowingness and ironic distance, genuine surprise is increasingly rare — a spiritual luxury that brings us close to something ancient' (S. Anderson). Meanwhile, Jason Middleton argues that '[reaction] videos solicit a response based solely upon their capacity to represent moments of affective intensity in their subjects' (109). Reactions may thus introduce a dimension of affective intensity into a street magic encounter that a sceptical viewer could otherwise easily dismiss as

faked or staged. The reaction may be read as genuine and spontaneous, even if the effect is not. These layers of excessive, joyful, astonished, and therefore implicitly authentic reactions are offered to the viewer as a way of grounding the effect in the real world. For Middleton, though, the relation between the subject of the video and the person viewing it need not 'be characterised by mimicry' (109). The viewer may laugh when the subject of the reaction video cries, screams, recoils or vomits, suggesting a detachment between the subject and the viewer. Similarly, though viewers may share the astonishment and bewilderment of the spectator towards the magic effect, the spectator's reaction offers a further spectacular dimension for the benefit of the viewer. Viewers may laugh at the stunned, mute confusion represented on screen, for example, or at the comically timed utterance 'Cool' following the performance of an effect. Alternatively, they may be envious of the spectator's privileged position in witnessing the apparently 'unmediated' effect for themselves. The pleasures of viewing are multiplied as street magic offers the viewer a range of possible relations to what is unfolding on screen, so that they are responding not only to the effect, but the reactions of the ordinary people as 'media content' (G. Turner 171).

The sense of spontaneity and authenticity in Blaine's street magic is supported by moments where it seems that an effect could be derailed by a spectator's unpreparedness for their role as participant. In *Street Magic*, Blaine performs a variation on three-card Monte, using only two cards, to several disparate groups of spectators, including a group of black men on the street in Compton, CA. The routine requires Blaine to give verbal instructions in rapid succession, as he asks a participant to select a card, hold both their selected card and another in their hands, guess which card is on top, and turn them over to reveal that at some point he has 'switched out' the original cards with another two from the pack. The effect derives its power from the fast pace, and the participant becomes increasingly suspicious about what he is being asked to do, hesitating to perform the required actions and questioning Blaine about what is happening. While his confusion adds to the impact of the reveal, at times it seems as if the visible agitation is about to spill over into outright rebelliousness and refusal to perform altogether. Blaine manages this situation by talking over him, refusing to respond to his questions or comments, instead redirecting him towards the effect by commanding the group to 'look' and 'watch'. At the close of the effect, the nervous energy conveyed by the participant and other spectators is redirected into laughter and passionate expressions of disbelief, delighted that one of their number has been made to look a fool. These spectators may be read using television's stereotyping racial lexicon as a threatening street gang whose potential for aggression is diminished by Blaine, his ability to

neutralise an antagonistic situation suggesting that no situation or location is off-limits to him. These moments also suggest that the spectators have not been prepared or coached, such that the threat of derailment suggested by the tension and agitation enhances the impact of the reveal. Such reactions convey that the mediating influence of television that makes events run smoothly and predictably is not in operation at these moments, thereby reinforcing the narrative that Blaine's extraordinary magic constitutes an unexpected intervention in everyday life.

However, there are times where the choice of spectators in Blaine's street magic highlight the staged nature of the reality that the programmes present. In the more recent specials *Real or Magic?* (2013) and *Beyond Magic* (2016), Blaine recruits celebrity participants as well as anonymous passers-by encountered by chance, and the venue of Blaine's performance magic shifts between the implicitly public and ordinary street, to domestic or otherwise private spaces, such as hotel rooms, inhabited by the celebrities. This relocation from the public venue of the street with the conceit of the chance encounter, to a private space where the encounter with spectators has clearly been pre-arranged, draws upon the strain of television that indulges curiosity regarding the private spaces of famous and influential people, including *Through the Keyhole* (1987- 2008) and *MTV Cribs* (2000- present). It suggests a shift from the 'everyday' to the 'backstage', and further enmeshes fictions and reality.

On one hand, it is gratifying to see stars with whom viewers may feel intimacy respond to magic in ways that appear unrehearsed and spontaneous. There is a similar range of reactions as in earlier street magic specials, gasps of astonishment and delight, mute confusion, screams of disgust and so forth. In *Real or Magic?* the comedian Ricky Gervais seemingly cannot contain his consternation at an effect where Blaine appears to push a needle through his own bicep and then withdraw it, his verbal response once the effect is over rapidly moving between various degrees of belief and scepticism:

Oh David, what have you done? Are you a maniac? That's real. That's real, that's not a trick. (Sees Blaine's intact arm) Oh, for fuck's sake! Fucking hell! (Blaine gets up and moves out of shot) I don't un- that's, that's not a trick. He stuck a needle through his arm. You saw it. You saw it. Right? He stuck a needle through his fucking arm. But... he couldn't've, because no-one would do that. So how did he do it? Why would you? Why would you do that?

As with the woman who believed Blaine to have supernatural powers, Gervais' bafflement discloses the reality of Blaine's extraordinary acts.

On the other hand, viewers are highly aware that the public image of celebrities necessarily involves some degree of fiction, and that 'backstage' moments present ideal opportunities to shore up these fictions. Some reactions in *Real or Magic?* seem suspiciously commensurate with the participant's public image. For example, after Blaine takes an orange from a fruit bowl in Harrison Ford's kitchen and cuts it open to reveal the playing card that Ford has been imagining, Ford shows the card to the camera, turns back to Blaine and growls, 'Get the fuck out of my house'. In another sequence, Woody Allen nervously observes Blaine spouting huge quantities of water and, finally, live fish into a marbled bathtub, before wryly commenting, 'I can't take you anyplace.' It seems Ford and Allen are responding in character, playing up to the viewer's imaginations of what they are 'really' like. In these instances, the common-sense, shared notion of the everyday takes on a more overtly performed character in a 'backstage' venue. This perhaps produces a more complex notion of reality than is seen elsewhere in the street magic specials. There is a suggestion that the 'real' people in these moments may be drawing on a repertoire or reputation established prior to the encounter, perhaps informed by the 'mental pictures and ideas' (Roach 17) of these stars already in circulation. These celebrity spectators cannot be said to unambiguously signify reality, and their presence may, to some extent, disclose the fictional aspects of Blaine's magic. Similar tensions are conveyed in the representation of real places, as the locations move from a familiar urban environment to the exotic 'elsewhere'.

3.2 Real places: 'everyday' and 'elsewhere'

The street as a performance venue suggests a rejection of the stage and the studio, and their associations with theatricality and artifice. If the street can be regarded as the locus of the everyday, Blaine's street magic specials offer the fantasy of a break from the passivity and repetition of everyday life. Reflecting on the concept of street magic in a recorded talk for the online symposium Essential Magic Conference in 2012, Blaine tells the story of how he and mentor Paul Harris developed the idea:

I always thought, if a real magician really existed, like a real magician wouldn't have a big patter. I kind of felt like a real magician would just pick something up, like a rock and say, 'Look', and he would squeeze it, and it would become sand... I think that was the whole concept, to do simple things that would affect somebody immediately, that they possibly could believe, and then walk away. [Paul] called it 'urban shaman', it's like you

enter somebody's life, you try to affect them for a moment, and then you wander away.
(‘David Blaine - The Concept Behind Street Magic - The Urban Shaman’)

Though not a descriptor that has adhered throughout Blaine's career, the concept of the ‘urban shaman’ is highly suggestive. The term ‘urban’ locates street magic both temporally and spatially, suggesting that the performer operates in the present and in the familiar environment of the city. It further develops the show's representation of city structures and rhythms as inherently secular and rational, with performance magic as a way of bringing wonder and enchantment to people amongst the traffic and concrete. ‘Shaman’ evokes an idea of magic as ritual, in particular ritual healing, seeking to effect change in the world through supernatural means. Bringing these two terms together suggests a body that does not belong to the surroundings in which it operates, a container for supernatural, quasi-mythical power in a developed, rational environment. The idea of the television magician as familiar, family-friendly entertainment is disturbed by the implicit suggestion of real power that could possibly be believed in at the core of the performance. Situating Blaine's effects within a familiar urban environment is key to framing them as extraordinary moments that interrupt everyday life, possessing an ambiguous reality. When the shooting location moves outside this environment, to places that are to be read as exotic ‘elsewhere’, there is a more urgent need to disclose the effects as fictional.

The range of locations represented in the street magic specials constantly reminds the viewer that the attractions of Blaine's magic are situated in the real world, rather than a controlled studio or theatre space. The locations within the United States are announced in ways that draw attention to the hypermediated nature of the programmes. In *Street Magic*, for example, the location of Times Square is declared by Blaine in a piece directly addressing the camera, Atlantic City is signalled by focusing on a sign over the city's boardwalk, and ‘Dallas, TX’ is chromakeyed in on screen followed by a shot of the landmark Reunion Tower. These segments are tied together by footage of Blaine walking alone along a street, presumably within that city or neighbourhood, accompanied by a slow, percussive soundtrack, in a way that sets his body against this urban landscape. In *Magic Man*, the journey that Blaine and his crew undertake is highlighted by graphics that enact the transition between segments by signifying the next destination on a map. Stops on the journey include a number of US cities that are nationally significant in terms of their cultural heritage- Memphis, Nashville, New Orleans- each city being aurally tagged with a short track of a genre of music it is known for- respectively, blues, country, and jazz. This announcement of a range of locations casts Blaine as a travelling wonder worker, ‘an alluring combination of

shaman and showman' (Lavender 115), drawing upon theatrical and religious elements and recontextualising them to suggest that even the modern urban everyday can be enchanted. A shaman might be expected to be a fixed part of a community, yet 'walking away' and 'wandering' are key features of Blaine's persona, and this is connected with the idea that street magic brings magic 'to the people' (Ryan). The voiceover that opens *Street Magic* performs this association as it intones, 'David has travelled across the country, sharing his special skill... The street is his stage. David's magic is in your face, pure and undeniable. No admission charge, no rules. No mirrors. Ordinary people, extraordinary magic'. Blaine's street magic can thus be understood as a remediation of the performance tradition of the travelling show, only with the fun and miracles of the carnival contained in the body of a single performer who moves from place to place.

Despite this emphasis on a range of shooting locations, the 'streets' where street magic takes place appear decontextualised from real spatial relations that might suggest a physical journey; instead, the term 'street' appears to signify an affinity with hip-hop culture. Rashad Shabazz comments on the 'radical spatial origins' (379) of hip-hop practices as a way of claiming a public space from which black men were excluded, arguing that 'because hip-hop is an art form cultivated in the public arena, these spaces enable MCs to use space transgressively: parks, street corners, and city blocks become places to practice and perform' (373). These improvisatory forms that resignify urban space as a rehearsal and performance venue are clearly referenced in Blaine's street magic, yet the placemaking impetus behind them is absent from the shows. *Street Magic* is not sequenced by location, but instead jumps back and forth between places, with similar effects often grouped together to show audience reactions, thereby suggesting a commitment to 'the hip hop aesthetic' of 'cut-and-mix', which 'allows for sharp and abrupt discontinuities or "cuts" as it encourages continuity by way of the all-important "mix"' (Dimitriadis 183). For Greg Dimitriadis, the 'cut-and-mix' style is present in the core practices of hip-hop culture, including breakdancing and DJing, creating a dual effect of fragmentation and cohesiveness. The 'cut-and-mix' aesthetic in *Street Magic* and *Magic Man* is used to suggest a wide-ranging journey through space, yet the shows do not dwell on the particularities of the places themselves. In Blaine's shows, cities appear indistinguishable from one another, with a street in New York looking much the same as one in Dallas, so these seem less like real spaces that extend beyond the screen, and more like sets in a backlot that will be deserted once filming is over. This lack, or rather loss, of connection to place may also be traced in hip-hop culture. Dimitriadis notes that hip-hop's status as an assemblage of primarily live practices diminished in the mid-1980s, as 'community

performance and entertainment on a decentralised scale gave way to worldwide mediation by and through centralised recording media' (186-7). In this account, hip-hop culture shifted from shared social spaces and embodied engagements, to a narrower focus on studio production of rap music for individualised listeners. In 1997, by the time *Street Magic* was broadcast, this shift was under way, and this sense of street culture as global idiom rather than spatial practice is reflected in the representation of urban space within the text. The material, social, and political realities of urban living and their significance seem to disappear into an aestheticised representation of urban space as a backdrop for the attractions of the magic effects. In the early street magic programmes, the 'street' is not a noun that denotes a specific place, but is adjectival, a descriptor that signals the 'cut-and-mix' aesthetic of Blaine's magic and its affinity with hip-hop culture.

While Blaine's street magic is connected to both the theatrical past of the travelling show and the more recent practices of hip-hop in its representation of public, urban space, the cultural referents that the show employs when it moves outside the mainland US to the developing global south are markedly different. The shooting location of *Magic Man* moves to 'Haiti' (the specific town or city is not named), followed even more vaguely by a place described as 'Yanomami territories, South America', namely an area of the Amazon rainforest around the border between Brazil and Venezuela populated by a group of indigenous communities known to the global north as the Yanomami. This vagueness in given location signals a shift from the recognisable and familiar 'everyday' to the 'elsewhere'. A different representational strategy is required to drive home the point that we are not in Kansas any more.

This strategy is based on idea expressed in voiceover, although unsubstantiated, that neither of these cultures shares a Western understanding of magic, as Haiti is 'a culture which is deeply rooted in magic' but is one in which 'magic and voodoo are considered the same thing' (*Magic Man*). This is reiterated through the inclusion of what appears to be a recording of a voodoo ritual (although it is not identified as such), and several encounters with local people who are approached but unwilling to take part in the show. Their reluctance is interpreted, correctly or otherwise, as a fear of magic itself, as is made clear through Blaine's attempts to explain, 'It's not what you think', 'It's not black magic', 'It is good for you, it's fun'. In avoiding the comparison with voodoo, Blaine distances himself from the suggestion that he could possess real power, implicit in the familiar urban environs of *Street Magic*, and instead aligns himself with purely secular, entertainment magic. While Haiti is represented as a place where inhabitants possess an

excessive fear of performance magic, conflating it with 'black magic', it is explained through voiceover in *Magic Man* that performance magic is not a part of the Yanomami's cultural framework, hence they are unable to relate to his performances on any level. The Yanomami themselves are characterised as a hostile, violent, and homogenous group, as Blaine's voiceover states, 'We were warned by everyone not to visit the Yanomami. The last group of outsiders were chased away with poisonous spears'. This time there are no spears, but the spectators are initially unenthusiastic about Blaine's effects, a response that is interpreted within the show as a failure to recognise playing cards or follow Blaine's instructions. Blaine adapts his repertoire to solicit the desired, appreciative response that ensures filming can continue, with effects including levitating leaves and using sleight-of-hand to transpose coins from one location to another. This improvisation is framed as a resourceful, ingenious response to these spectators' lack of 'cultural competency' (During 2) with regard to performance magic.

However, in *Street Magic*, Blaine often performs in everyday situations where language and culture could conceivably be a barrier, for example for groups of Chinese tourists in New York. These encounters are not explicitly presented as fraught with difficulty. Moreover, within US cities throughout *Street Magic* and *Magic Man*, Blaine's repertoire repeatedly includes effects that do not rely on an understanding of how playing cards are used in magic, for example biting into and restoring a coin, or appearing to rotate his arm unnaturally within its socket. By contrast, *Magic Man* insists that *these* spectators in this 'elsewhere' place are unable to appreciate Blaine's work, and that this incompetence stems from their lack of prior knowledge of the difference between performance and ritual magic. In these encounters, performance magic is framed not as a universally intelligible and enjoyable form that can be transported globally, as in During's description, but as a culturally specific form that depends upon a prior familiarity with its conventions.

Looking at performance magic's theatrical past unlocks the further critical implications of this framing. Where inhabitants of the mainland, urban US are depicted as suffering from an excess of rationality that can be remedied by a dose of enchantment, the Haitian and Yanomami spectators are identified as possessing too much credulity, which can be rectified by learning to recognise performance magic as entertainment rather than harmful ritual. This framing echoes an episode that reportedly took place during Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin's 1856 performances in Algeria, as related in his autobiography, *Confidences d'un prestidigiteur* (1859). These performances were apparently in service of France's colonial project. Robert-Houdin relates that

he had been commissioned by the head of the French colonial administration to perform before 'the Arabs', in hope of breaking the 'pernicious influence' of Sufi religious leaders, called Marabouts, over the Muslim population (n.p.). Robert-Houdin is charged to 'prove to the Arabs that the tricks of their Marabouts were mere child's play, and owing to their simplicity could not be done by an envoy from Heaven, which also led us very naturally to show them that we are their superiors in everything' (n.p.). In his performances, Robert-Houdin demonstrates an invulnerability to bullets, performs the Inexhaustible Bottle illusion in which a variety of beverages are made to appear from the same vessel, and humiliates a member of the audience by causing a light chest to become too heavy for him to lift. In fact, the entire premise of this undertaking depended on an ignorance of Sufi illusions. Graham M. Jones writes that they were performed according to well-established representational conventions of the time and would not have been received as 'real' by a local audience, however, 'unfavorably comparing the supposed credulity of indigenous audiences toward conjuring performances and their own attitude of incredulity toward magic as a form of disenchanted entertainment enabled Europeans to use magic as a marker of cultural difference in colonial encounters' ('The Family Romance of Modern Magic' 51).

Although Blaine does not arrive in Haiti or South America as an envoy of the state, there are shades of this narrative of excessive credulity in the representation of people and places in the global south. The inclusion of places in the developing world in *Magic Man* does not seem to represent a genuine attempt to explore the transcultural significance of magic. Indeed, the index used to measure the 'uncivilisedness' of these cultures is the reported inability of the population to understand the differences between ritual and entertainment magic. The show contains no gestures towards interrogating or subverting this stereotype, so that *Magic Man* can be read as reinforcing the context of its production, in this case global cultural hierarchies, where it might have used notions of transformation to unsettle it.

Analysing the representational strategies that distinguish 'everyday' and 'elsewhere' places in *Magic Man* also shows the multiple levels of reality at play in these works. When in the US, Blaine is able to play on the ambiguity that the urban setting of street magic creates, neither confirming nor denying to spectators that he is 'a guru' or psychic, in order to provide moments of magic to a disenchanted population. This is a world that viewers are to recognise as the everyday, familiar world that they inhabit, populated by real people just like them. Elsewhere, on the other hand, Blaine is required to distance himself from efficacious magic, explicitly denying the possibility he may really possess supernatural powers and emphasising the playful, fictional

aspects of the practice. Blaine is able to perform both these personas in the same text without any apparent internal contradiction, showing the flexibility of magic and ultimately positioning himself as an exceptional figure, capable of performing extraordinary acts.

The notion of Blaine's body as extraordinary provides a conceptual link between the street magic specials and the later stunt performances that are the focus of the following sections. *Magic Man* especially displays Blaine's body. He swallows a piece of thread and pulls it out through his abdomen, reveals a chosen card as a tattoo on his chest and a written prediction on his arm, and passes a knife through his lower lip. Any pain he suffers is expressed minimally in a few grunts. These effects encourage viewers to imagine that his body itself is the sole cause of these extraordinary feats. Blaine's endurance feats, of which his repertoire largely consisted from 1999 until the airing of the 2013 special *Real or Magic?*, are also committed to maintaining this appearance. The endurance works often featured extreme privation, such as the requirement to fast or forego sleep for the duration, and were performed in public places and covered by various media outlets. Perhaps the major difference between these performances and the street magic repertoire, which conformed more easily to performance magic conventions, is that the latter possess a clearer status as fiction. When encountering performance magic that simulates bodily risk, like the classic stage illusion 'Sawing a Woman', spectators are usually given to understand that they are witnessing an astonishing effect, rather than a performance of real physical jeopardy. By contrast, Blaine's audience are asked to believe that his endurance performances are for real, that there is no apparatus of illusion or deception present that might invalidate the extraordinary nature of his achievements. At the same time, as Sara Jane Bailes argues, bodies that are 'framed by the temporal and spatial demarcations of a performance event' can challenge the audience to 'draw a clear distinction between an event's "real" or "fictional" status, or to mark where one category of experience blends into another' (9). The multiple levels of reality at play in Blaine's endurance events are of concern in the following section.

3.3 Reality and fiction in *Above the Below*

In a press conference prior to *Above the Below* that is featured in the documentary of the same name, Blaine explains the concept thus:

I consider it a piece of performance art, and I also consider it something that, for me, is like the ultimate truth. I think when you have nothing, like when you're living with

nothing, there's no distractions, you're just there, as you are, almost struggling. I think that that's the purest state we can be in.

Immediately afterwards, Blaine states that he would like to be remembered 'as the greatest showman of all time', undercutting the concern with 'truth' by positioning himself in the theatrical realm of spectacle and illusion. For Lavender, it is this layering of reality and fiction that gives Blaine's stunt performances their appeal; they are 'alluring partly because of the concatenation of the biophysical feat of endurance with Blaine's persona as a high-calibre trickster and magician' (114). Mangan likewise suggests that *Above the Below*'s appeal lies in its ambiguity, as it consciously departs from the traditions of performance magic while retaining an attachment to it as a practice. He characterises the piece as 'non-matrixed magic', that is 'a form of performance which deliberately eschews the pleasures of the well-made play, abandoning narrative and concentrating on the fact of its own being to the extent that the spectator seems to become irrelevant... It is myth-making: conscious and pre-meditated' (189).

Given this departure from 'matrixed' performance magic, how are the realities and fictions mentioned by Lavender layered in *Above the Below*, and what role do the mediating influences of television play in this? The remainder of this section addresses this question, considering both the durational performance *Above the Below* and the televised documentary of the same name. While the street magic specials signalled their investment in the real world through grounding Blaine's extraordinary effects in real places using real people as spectators, the durational event *Above the Below* largely articulated its reality status through various layers of mediation and affinities with media culture. It seems that the veracity of the stunt was generally accepted, since it was critiqued mostly on the basis of its entertainment value, rather than the validity of Blaine's self-starvation. Remediated as a documentary, though, other elements were placed alongside footage of the stunt that shifted the work back towards a more recognisable territory of performance magic, which indicates that the form's theatrical and fictional mode may not be entirely abandoned by Blaine.

Even in its durational form, *Above the Below* was multiply mediated. For forty-four days, Blaine was incarcerated in a Plexiglass box suspended thirty feet above the south bank of the River Thames, close to Tower Bridge. The dimensions of the box allowed him to stand, sit, and lie down, and contained some bedding and continence aids. He remained there without food, reportedly relying on four and a half litres of water each day for sustenance (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.). A webcam was installed inside the box, its live feed accessible via Channel 4's website and

interactive services on Sky 1, 'to allow those present, and those watching on television, the opportunity of getting the best possible close-up view of Blaine' (Walsh 150). Unlike the street magic shows, this configuration implies no 'backstage' or 'offscreen' arrangement where the secret method might take place. This resonates with Bolter and Grusin's argument that 'immediacy leads to hypermediacy' (19); in an effort to offer spectators an experience that feels closer and more authentic, the webcam as medium is foregrounded. Nevertheless, this was also a public event that invited people to go and see for themselves, without their perception being technologically mediated. Some years before, Blaine had announced the intention of *Street Magic* to 'bring magic back to the place it used to be 100 years ago... I like the way Houdini brought magic to the people on the streets, genuinely' (Ryan). Though this statement may sweep aside the intervening century of busking or strolling performance magic, and perhaps be undercut by Blaine's later links with the opportunistically populist figure of Donald Trump, *Above the Below* could be connected to this democratic project of bringing entertainment to the people by inviting spectators to engage with astonishing feats taking place before their very eyes.



Figure 2. David Blaine suspended above London, in front of City Hall. Taken by Mark Morton.

The reporting of Blaine's real bodily risk in minute detail emphasised the reality status of the stunt and justified it as an event, as did the presence of a medical team on site. Due to Blaine's isolation and removal, spectators only had access to auditory and visual elements of the performance (being able to, for example, smell or touch the deteriorating body might have negated its dignity). His physical state received much media interest, as if zooming in to the micro-level activities of the body might compensate for the lack of action visible to the naked eye. Physical symptoms experienced during Blaine's confinement reportedly included heart palpitations, breathing problems, backache and blurred vision (Burkeman; Craig; Mann). The team of scientists recording the process of refeeding Blaine after his prolonged fast, taking a rare opportunity to study the effects of starvation on a non-obese subject, note the daily testing of Blaine's urine and periodic testing of his water supply, as well as the collection of data through the live camera feed (Jackson et al. 890-1). They report that upon his emergence, he had lost 24.5 kilograms of fat and muscular tissue, equating to a quarter of his original body weight (Jackson et al. 892). These multiple layers of mediation helped to establish the reality and validity of Blaine's self-starvation (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.).

Above the Below resonates with a popular culture in which mediated articulations of reality are complex and layered with fiction. The conditions of the performance mirror contemporary trends in reality television, for example those noted by Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood. These trends include the performance of self-governance in programmes such as *What Not to Wear* (2001- 2007), which 're-invest [questions of social structure] through discourses of self-hood and self-responsibility', and the culture of increased surveillance in programmes such as *Big Brother*, in which being watched becomes a form of labour (Skeggs and Wood 28; 30). Both trends are foregrounded in *Above the Below* to an extreme degree, as Blaine isolates himself from the external world and submits to constant, intense surveillance in return for an undisclosed amount of compensation. Biressi and Nunn comment that footage of Blaine's exit from *Above the Below* constitutes 'a spectacular rendition of the "before and after" imagery used by advertising for charities and slimming clubs alike', suggesting 'a kind of "technics of the self" in which individuals can through self-monitoring form and transform their bodies and, consequently, their souls, thoughts and conduct' (*Reality TV* 136-7). *Above the Below* rehearses a vigilant and disciplined self that has internalised its surveillance, be it orchestrated by the state or by television producers, as a path towards fulfilment.

The thematic connections between the work and popular television were noted in commentary on the work by British media outlets and used as a critique of both. Writing for *The Telegraph*, Olga Craig draws a connection between Blaine's stunt and *Big Brother*: 'like the contestants in the Big Brother house, he is unaware of what has been written and said of him... he will discover that the crowds who came to watch his misery did so more to mock than to marvel: no one was overly impressed'. Carole Caplin of *The Daily Mail* adopts a position of pure cynicism: 'maybe Blaine is trying to make some sort of incredibly ironic, post-modern statement about the worst aspects of our celebrity-obsessed culture, the depths to which reality TV will sink, and the decadence of modern society. Or maybe he'll just do anything for attention and money'. Here, reality television is invoked in order to dismiss it, through placing it within the imagined worst excesses of mediatised culture (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.). These perspectives may stem at least in part from the respective places of print journalism and popular television in the hierarchies of contemporary media culture. As Graeme Turner observes, 'conventionally, of course... declaiming the rising hegemony of entertainment is a standard strategy within elite critiques of the media and popular culture in general' (160). Whether or not these assessments of *Above the Below*, and by extension twenty-first century popular culture, are accepted, it is significant that their appraisals focus upon the work's entertainment value, rather than its reality status.

To put it another way, engagement with the durational work by these journalists writing for British news outlets is not expressed in terms of belief or disbelief, but with its nature as a spectacle. Indeed, the perception that Blaine really was starving himself formed the basis for much of the work's criticism, as it was felt that this did not provide a compelling fiction. A similar dilemma is narrated in Franz Kafka's short story *The Hunger Artist* (2012).¹¹ Even at the height of the titular hunger artist's popularity, it is impossible to prove for certain that he really was fasting constantly- because of the continuous observation that this would entail- 'so that only he could be at the same time the fully satisfied spectator of his own hungering' (Kafka 58). In the end, the hunger artist dies not from lack of food, but at the point when the attention of the public is lost forever despite his commitment to his art. In the same breath as praising the *Street Magic* and *Magic Man* specials as 'the biggest break through done in our lifetime', Penn Jillette of the magician duo Penn and Teller dismisses the endurance performances as 'all the "I'm really not

¹¹ *A Hunger Artist* was published in 1922, this thesis cites a more recent translation.

kidding, honestly I'm not going to eat, swear to God I'm not eating, no really I'm not eating, no it's not a trick I'm really not eating." I don't know what that is' (qtd. in E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.). The category anxiety appears to hinge upon the apparent lack of illusion in the narrative—that if Blaine really is doing what he appears to be doing, in what sense can we consider this magic? The commitment to 'reality' shown in *Above the Below* was critiqued by other commentators of the time. Michael Billington, theatre critic for the *Guardian*, attended twenty-two days into the duration of the piece. He attempted to place the work in terms of performance tradition, asking 'What are we really watching? A piece of performance art? A 44-day play? A theatrical illusion?' Another piece lamented the apparent lack of showmanship in the work, characterising the 'passive' Blaine as 'humourless', adopting 'a condescending, priggish smirk' or 'looking faintly mournful and mystified at his strange situation' (Borkowski). The earnestness with which Blaine approached the reality of his mortality seemed to foreclose the possibility of responding to the performance as entertainment, with the amusement or astonishment usually solicited by performance magic. It may be that the mediation of the durational event and its affinity with popular media invited a more detached form of engagement.

To approach this, it is useful to trace the connections between *Above the Below* and the 'demonstrative' performances of self through endurance identified in Chris Burden's early pieces by Patrick Anderson (77). For Anderson, works such as *Five Day Locker Piece* (1971) and *Doomed* (1975) demanded a strenuous form of participation from the spectator: '[Burden's] body was not simply on the line, objectified as at risk by the demands of the aesthetic encounter; it was also sustained by that encounter, made present to itself and others by the sustenance of the look' (83). The 'economy' of performances of self-starvation, a mode of exchange or transaction rather than mere 'encounter', pushes the audience to 'grapple with their accountability within institutional structures' (Anderson 83). As such, Burden's performances disclose the 'profoundly social, intersubjective character of both the body's economy of consumption and the institutional economy' (Anderson 83). Although *Above the Below* shares a conceptual affinity with *Five Day Locker Piece* and *Doomed*, Burden's work seems to implicate the spectator as witness to a greater degree, and this may be because of the distancing effect offered by the forms of mediation at play in the durational work.

The knowledge that Blaine is being observed in his isolation and the inability of spectators to intervene, even if they were moved to do so, may preclude the type of confrontation that Anderson sees in Burden's work. It is worth considering how the layers of mediation in *Above the*

Below may in fact work to displace these fears. The display of institutional care through surveillance and monitoring may itself be considered a mediating element, not only demonstrating the validity of the fast, but also perhaps assisting in diminishing the sense of risk and allaying spectators' concern for Blaine's wellbeing. This is the position taken by Fintan Walsh, who argues that Blaine's performance of self-starvation primarily solicits a contemplative response. For Walsh, 'owing to the fact that [Blaine] does not openly display any obvious signs of abjection, and medical professionals carefully monitor his physical health, the spectator is primarily invited to "gaze up" at his superhuman achievement' (152), rather than feel concern for Blaine or for themselves as witnesses. Spectators may have sensed that the invulnerability and self-sufficiency of Blaine's body precludes any need for their intervention; in Mangan's words, the work '[concentrates] on the fact of its own being to the extent that the spectator seems to become irrelevant' (189).

Unlike Burden's work, Blaine's must conform to the demands and expectations of television as a medium. The event therefore finds different expression in the documentary *Above the Below*, with this remediated work seeking a more overt connection to themes of illusion and enchantment as well as explicitly tethering the piece to Blaine's autobiography. The documentary *Above the Below* comprises an edited version of the live broadcast of the final hour of Blaine's confinement and his emergence from the box, appearing on Channel 4 on 20 October 2003. This recording is interspersed with clips of effects that reflect street magic conventions, press conferences that took place before the event began, and various moments from the duration of the event including spectators dancing before the camera (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.). For Lavender, Blaine's 'persona' as 'David Blaine, illusionist, in splendid isolation as talented magus, a man of literally super-human (indeed supernatural) capability', 'an individual with a biography, and an alluring combination of showman and shaman' gives the stunt performances 'added potency' (115). The documentary contributes to the fashioning of Blaine's persona by interspersing footage from the final hour of the stunt with a varied palette of images that contextualise and interpret Blaine's suffering.

These images include sequences where Blaine throws playing cards at the camera while apparently covered in blood, and later tells a joke to a group of naked women arranged around him on a white set of sofas, who then dance before the camera while Blaine manipulates cards, affecting to ignore them. These moments of self-conscious display tend to undermine the professions towards antitheatricity that Blaine espouses in his 'urban shaman' statement

regarding street magic, and his self-stated mission of bringing magic back to people 'genuinely' (Ryan). Instead, they rely on the premise of the visual shock, said by Tom Gunning to characterise the mode of the 'attraction' ('An Aesthetic of Astonishment' 84), the spectacle of blood and naked female bodies rehearsing the aestheticisation of violence and sex in contemporary visual media (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.). These episodes interrupt the insistence on immediacy that was present in the durational event, instead connecting the stunt with a mode of 'hypermediacy', Bolter and Grusin's term for the multiplication of media (71). The introduction of the playing cards, those quintessential tools of the magician, perhaps shifts the work away from 'non-matrixed magic' (Mangan 189) and towards the recognisable realm of performance magic. The inclusion of autobiographical details also contributes to the narrative of Blaine's exceptionalism. Where Blaine had been oblique about the meaning of his self-starvation prior to the event, as in the press conference statement about wanting to achieve a pure state, in the documentary his suffering is explicitly linked to a traumatic life story (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.). The work is explained as honouring the suffering of his mother, who had died of ovarian cancer some years before the event: 'I watched people that I loved and were close to me deteriorate and die in front of my face... My mother, the whole time she was dying, she never complained about anything once'. Here, Blaine's public physical suffering is named as an expression of private emotional trauma, reinforcing his persona as 'an individual with a biography' (Lavender 115). In the documentary, Blaine's own authoritative voice is employed to comment on his experience, informing us through voiceover, 'I am alive in here. I am more alive than I have ever been', staging an insistent subjecthood that thrives in the face of adversity and privation. These editorial choices produce a text that seems to take pleasure in its composite nature, staging a version of reality that is heightened and interspersed with moments of overt fiction.

The medium of the documentary allows for a narrative tension to build that resolves in the climactic sequence of Blaine's emergence from the box, providing a momentum absent from the durational performance. At this point, Blaine's body is placed at the visual and thematic centre of the text, producing a moment of almost feverish intensity, in contrast to the detached response solicited by the durational performance. As the door to the box is opened and Blaine exits onto a podium, he is handed a microphone and asked if there is anything he would like to say. After making his way unsteadily towards the assembled, cheering crowd, the camera tight on his gaunt face, he says in a voice thick with exhaustion, emotion or both:

This has been one of the most important experiences of my life. I've learned more in that little box than I have in years. I've learned how important it is to have a sense of humour and laugh at everything because nothing makes any sense anyway. I've learned how strong we all are as human beings. How strong we all are. But most importantly, I've learned to appreciate all the simple things in life. A smile from a strange one or a loved one, the sunrise, the sunset, everything that God has given us. And I thank you all so much, I love all of you forever, I love you all, I love you.

Blaine is then surrounded and literally supported by an emergency service crew, who fuss over him with offers of blankets and steady him as he walks, emphasising his vulnerability. They contribute to the drama of this moment by insisting that he be weighed immediately with his upper body exposed. His physical state is further reiterated by the on-screen captions that give the appearance of breaking news, denoting the immediacy and importance of the event. Finally, he is ushered onto a stretcher and into an ambulance that departs into the night, whisked away from the gaze of his fans and the Sky 1 and Channel 4 crews dispatched to cover the event.

This mediated staging reinforces the division between Blaine's extraordinariness and the viewing public's ordinariness, emphasising the special insight and elevated position gained through the superhuman efforts of his body. The indiscriminate, universal nature of the love Blaine claims, together with the general conditions of the durational performance involving abstinence, contemplation and solitude, inevitably evokes associations with the iconography of Christ. This supports Mangan's location of *Above the Below* in the 'interstices of the canonized and anathemized, of the holy and the pathological' (189). Mangan draws comparisons between Blaine and 'fasting girls' and saints who martyred themselves through their refusal to eat (189). The implication of sacred elements may invite viewers not simply to 'gaze up' (Walsh 152) at Blaine, but to believe in the myth of his extraordinary physicality, a myth that is reinforced by the ritualistic element of the public weighing. This presumably could have been performed in a more private space, but the choice to treat viewers to the sight of Blaine's lean torso means that they can verify the physical effect of his starvation for themselves. It both emphasises the veracity of Blaine's self-starvation, and invites wonder at his 'literally super-human (indeed supernatural) capability' (Lavender 115). The televisual event thus retroactively shapes the durational performance. It produces a composite text that layers the reality of Blaine's time in the box with overtly theatrical moments, claims to articulate the deeper emotional truths that inspired the

work, and dramatically heightens events as they unfold, so allowing it to be more aligned with performance magic rather than 'non-matrixed magic' (Mangan 189).

This process of retroactively shaping the durational event is also visible in the remediation of *Dive of Death*. However, in the case of *Dive of Death* it could even be considered a form of recuperation of the durational event, which failed to live up to the expectations that prior stunts had established and that Blaine and his sponsors had declared. Though *Above the Below* was described as failing to entertain, it succeeded insofar as Blaine survived the ordeal. *Dive of Death*, on the other hand, exposed both the vulnerabilities of Blaine's body and the mediating apparatus that surrounded the event, as a performance of virtuosity and mastery gone wrong.

3.4 *Dive of Death* and the recuperation of Blaine's body

By the time *Dive of Death* was performed in 2008, the conventions established by Blaine for his endurance performances included a level of stoicism in the face of privation and a capacity to resist normal physical needs and functions that seemed almost superhuman, as seen in *Above the Below*. After his emergence from the box and before *Dive of Death*, Blaine performed three further stunts. The first was *Drowned Alive* (2006), in which Blaine was 'submerged in an 8-foot-diameter water-filled sphere in front of the Lincoln Center in New York City for seven days and nights, using tubes for air and nutrition', the climax of which was an unsuccessful attempt to break the world for unassisted breath holding ('Drowned Alive'). Next was *Revolution* (2006), in which Blaine was 'shackled to a spinning gyroscope and hovering forty feet above Times Square' for a total of fifty-two hours before freeing himself ('Magician Blaine Ends Times Square Stunt'). In 2008, Blaine appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and successfully broke the world record for oxygen-assisted breath holding, setting a record for seventeen minutes and four seconds ('World Record'). These stunts shared with *Above the Below* the dimensions of bodily risk, extended duration, and public display that were mediated through television. *Dive of Death* was conceived according to a similar set of criteria, as Blaine was to be suspended upside down for sixty hours without food or water. However, the previous stunts had also staged a continuous period of restraint- either within a specially designed apparatus or in a corporeal sense, in the case of the breath-holding- followed by a climactic release. *Dive of Death* did not meet these conventions, as the display of Blaine's dangling body was regularly interrupted in a display that unintentionally highlighted his physical needs and vulnerabilities rather than his exceptional qualities.

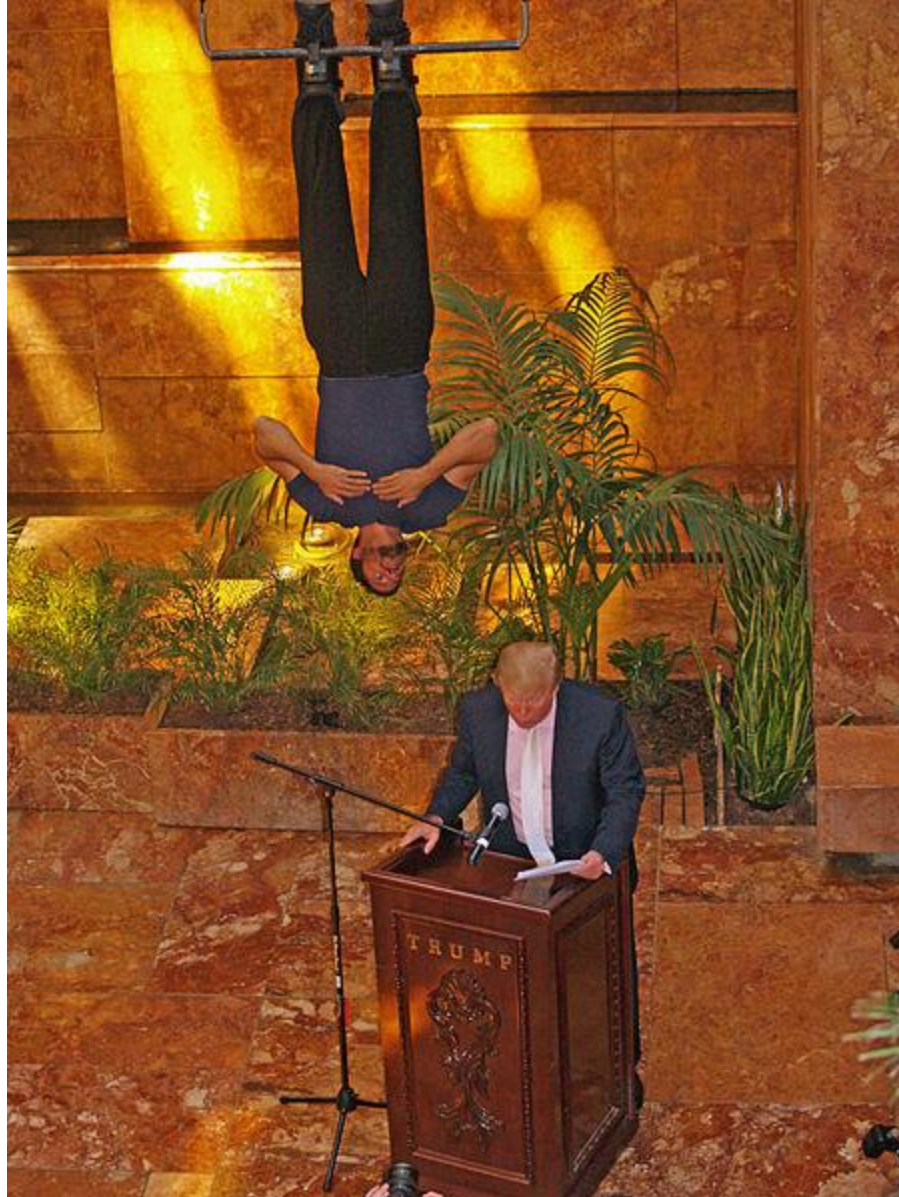


Figure 3. Donald Trump at a press conference with David Blaine announcing Blaine's latest feat. Taken by David Shankbone.

Dive of Death began on 23 September 2008, having been announced jointly by Blaine and his sponsor Donald Trump to take place outside Trump Tower. The event was ultimately located above the Wollman Rink in Central Park, but the sponsor, intended location and, indeed, timing of the stunt as taking place eight days after Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy, are significant. They signal an alignment with a specific type of individualism that thrives in the environment of the neoliberal city, that of a triumphant self liberated from restrictive collectivist values. The election of Trump to presidential office in 2016 suggests the enduring quality of this myth, even as the global economy has for nearly a decade since been subject to the catastrophic implications

of Lehman and other financial institutions' inadequate risk assessments. These implications had yet to fully unfold at the time of the stunt, but the failure of Blaine's performance may have especially grave consequences in this landscape. In the words of Sara Jane Bailes,

The discourse of failure as reflected in western art and literature seems to counter the very ideas of progress and victory that simultaneously dominate historical narratives. It undermines the perceived stability of mainstream capitalist ideology's preferred aspiration to achieve, succeed, or win, and the accumulation of material wealth as proof and effect arranged by those aims. (2)

It was in precisely these terms, of progress, victory, achievement, success, winning, and fictions of continuity, that Blaine's stunt can be seen as a failure.

The final hour, with its promise of an epic, death-defying mystery climax, was broadcast live by ABC on 25 September 2008. According to the press release reprinted by online magazine *The Futon Critic*, Blaine would 'attempt to hang from a thin wire five stories in the air with no safety net or airbag to break his fall':

For more than 60 spellbinding hours, Blaine will be on the wire without food. He will pull himself up to drink liquids and to restore circulation. He will need to fight off muscle spasms and lack of sleep, as well as maintain maximum concentration in order to be successful. He will have to hang on for his life, even sleeping by dangling upside down. ('David Blaine Stuns the World...')

The phrase 'pull himself up' aptly dramatises the journey of the ideal neoliberal subject, but fails to convey that Blaine would be standing upright, although not released from the harness supporting him, for between five to ten minutes per hour for the duration of the event (Soodin). According to an article by Fox News, a spokesperson for Blaine's public relations representatives Rubenstein Associates 'said he never intended to stay upside down for 60 consecutive hours', and that this measure was necessary for medical checks as well as allowing circulation to temporarily return to normal and for Blaine to 'relieve himself' (Miller). While intended to justify Blaine's periodic release on urgent medical grounds, this statement rather draws attention to the ordinariness of his body in its vulnerability and unruliness (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.). This runs counter to the narrative of heroism established in media references to the physical danger Blaine faces in undergoing this ordeal, with the BBC, *The Telegraph* and Reuters all reporting that he risked blindness (Mackenzie; 'David Blaine's Latest Stunt Could "Make Him

Blind””; Nichols). However, this threat of harm could not redeem *Dive of Death* in the eyes of a reporter for *Entertainment Weekly* who described the scene of the event in scathing terms:

This was the scene at the rink: Scaffolding [sic] everywhere, people snapping pictures, at least seven camera crews standing by for a press conference, security guys in suits with Secret Service-like earbuds, and red rope separating the public from Blaine. Meanwhile, the stuntman was not hanging. Nope... There was no diving and no death. (Juarez)

In this account, the activity and energy around the event underscores the lack of spectacle. As with *Above the Below*, the event is mediated by the presence of other bodies- here, rather than medical staff that communicate the riskiness of the event, the noted presences are those of ‘camera crews’ and ‘security guys’. This implies two purposes, to document and amplify the event through mediating technology, and to maintain Blaine’s safety. These two purposes seem rather at odds with one another, given that presumably the event is so uneventful due to the imperative to keep Blaine from harm (E. Turner, “I Am Alive in Here” n.p.). Juarez supports her interpretation of the event with quotes from underwhelmed bystanders: ‘one guy on his lunch break said to his friend, “Dude gets water breaks?” while another man nearby said, “It doesn’t count [if he isn’t doing it continuously]. I could do that”’. The mediating apparatus, including cameras and bodies, that literally surrounds the feat is unable to convey the difficulty of the undertaking. Therefore, it is perceived by these bystanders as something ‘I’ or theoretically anybody could do, so that Blaine’s body is interpreted as ordinary and thereby undeserving of its elevation to spectacular status.

The notion that *Dive of Death* was a ‘non-event’, a spectacle that failed to astonish, can perhaps be attributed to the fact that it had not been necessary in any previous events for Blaine to remove himself from his incarceration for health reasons. Rather, he worked to keep the evidence of the needs of his body, such as hydration and passing waste, as discreet as possible, without interrupting the spectacle or drawing attention to his bodily vulnerability. In her discussion of the film *Man on Wire*, Ruth Mackay argues that the discourse surrounding Phillippe Petit’s 1974 wire-walk between the Twin Towers reroutes the possibility of Petit’s death into ‘a kind of Burkean sublime — a spectacle which incites terror in its audience due to its overwhelming dangerousness without the beholder necessarily being in physical danger — without the problematic interference of moral questions concerning the pleasure accrued by the scene’ (11). Arguably, the process Mackay identifies requires spectators to invest emotionally in the spectacle to the extent that they feel a certain amount of fear on behalf of the performer, a fear that

heightens their own pleasure in the spectacle. However, this empathy must not extend to any ethical concerns, such as fears for the performer's safety, that could interrupt the contemplative process of 'gazing up', as Walsh described the mode of engagement invited by *Above the Below* (152). To avoid such concerns, the body cannot be perceived as actually endangered or vulnerable. In *Dive of Death*, the medical necessity of having to take standing breaks highlighted the endangerment of Blaine's body. As Blaine's body emerges as actually threatened, this theoretically forestalls the possibility of inspiring the sublime in the process that Mackay identifies. This seems to be supported by spectators' responses to *Dive of Death* mentioned above. Instead, spectators may question why, if the event is so patently unsafe and risky, is the body being forced into this vulnerable position in the first place ('there was no diving and no death')? And why this vulnerable body, rather than another, if there is nothing extraordinary about it ('it doesn't count, I could do that')? In *Dive of Death*, the event is not abstractly thrilling, as was Petit's unsupported wire-walk between two urban landmarks, but draws attention to the ways in which Blaine's body is ordinary and vulnerable, no different to those of the spectators gazing below (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.).

The failure of the event can be seen not only in terms of the collapse of the fiction of Blaine's extraordinary body, but also as an exposure of the vulnerabilities of television as a live medium. The mystery finish of the stunt was widely perceived as an anti-climax, even by Blaine himself. The planned '44ft plunge to the ground' followed by a 'ride into the night holding onto a big rig of balloons', turned into a bungee jump, after which he 'dangled awkwardly for a moment' and subsequently mysteriously disappeared (Thompson; 'Blaine Defends Upside Down Stunt'). Reportedly, Blaine blamed this on the delay of the broadcast, caused by the transmission of a presidential address by George W. Bush. During this delay, high winds picked up, and he was advised not to proceed with the planned ending (Thompson; Cruz and Sandora). To quote Blaine himself, '[i]t wasn't meant to be what it was on TV': there was a disparity between the planned stunt and what was eventually broadcast (Cruz and Sandora). Blaine's justifications seem to lean on the overexposure of the televisual event, as its dependence on weather conditions and running orders was made visible. Perhaps the unpredictability of actual live programming could not match up to the rhetoric of liveness as seen in the street magic specials. Amelia Jones refers to the 'contingency' of the performing body, its inability to contain a full 'repository of selfhood' on its own, adding that 'documents of the body-in-performance are just as clearly contingent, however, in that the meaning that accrues to this action, and the body-in-performance, is fully dependent

on the ways in which the image is contextualized and interpreted' (14). This contingency is apparent in *Dive of Death*, in which the 'liveness' of the event forced the broadcast to acknowledge the conditions of production and account for the fallibility and limitations not only of the star, but the medium of television itself (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.).

However, footage of the stunt was remediated in *What is Magic?* (2010), a television special that was primarily structured around an illusion where Blaine appears to catch a bullet fired at him in a steel cup held in his mouth. This type of effect valorises the role that the skilled body plays in magic:

Magicians do not merely know secrets; they embody secrets as know-how. In other words, magicians' secrets aren't just memorized instructions for performing tricks; they are skills and procedures that magicians imprint on their bodies through never-ending training, conditioning, and experimentation, both alone and in the company of other magicians. (G. M. Jones, *Trade of the Tricks* 6)

The bullet catch is underscored by a triumphal narrative of Blaine's physical courage and skill, the 'secrets' that are contained within his extraordinary body. Like the documentary *Above the Below*, *What is Magic?* draws attention to its mediated nature, being composed of footage from the durational event *Dive of Death* and juxtaposed with segments that show Blaine performing magic for people encountered on the street, interviews with Blaine about his childhood, preparation for the bullet catch, and the bullet catch itself. These disparate feats are consolidated into one text that calls back to the astonishing performance magic effects with which Blaine initially caught the world's attention. The text also implicitly includes the endurance stunts within the category of performance magic, opening with a voiceover that responds to its titular question, suggesting that magic is 'not in the trick we think we see', but 'the act itself', 'the image the magician creates', 'the way it makes us feel, that certain sense of childlike wonder'. In this admittedly broad description, the notion of 'tricks' and illusion are de-emphasised, and elements of act, image, and affect are taken to be fundamental to performance magic. If performance magic can be defined by a feeling of wonder or an image created by a magician, then all Blaine's achievements, even those that do not contain visual tricks or illusions, can be included in this category. *What is Magic?* can thus be said to prioritise affect over effect, in a further example of 'non-matrixed magic' (Mangan 189). Moreover, the remediation of *Dive of Death* offered an opportunity not only to re-establish Blaine's reputation as a worker of wonders, but given the social and political framing of *Dive of Death*, to shore up his status as a 'productive "winner"' (Bailes 16).

Where the live broadcast exposed the vulnerabilities of both Blaine's body and the medium of live television, *What is Magic?* constitutes a coherent text with a specific narrative, that establishes Blaine's body as a closed, invulnerable unit. This is evident not only from the anticipated bullet catch, but also a segment in which the professional fighter Kimbo Slice punches Blaine in the stomach twice, the second time at Blaine's explicit request after he is left only winded by the first. The sequence references a moment from magic's theatrical past, namely Harry Houdini's death from peritonitis, preceded (even perhaps precipitated) by a medical student delivering several blows to his abdomen (Kasson 154). Where Houdini eventually fell following his pummelling, this interlude in *What is Magic?* serves to establish Blaine's physical toughness and resilience.

The programme also shows the extensive preparation for the bullet catch, emphasising the controlled environment as opposed to the public setting of the 'dive', the closed set signalling that the event is intended to be televised rather than accessible to a co-present audience. The hazardous nature of the event is communicated through verbally emphasising that magicians have been killed in the past by attempting similar feats, so that both the risks to Blaine's person and the extraordinariness of his body in overcoming these risks are made clear to the viewer (E. Turner, "I Am Alive in Here" n.p.). Other members of the crew seem nervous, with one even attempting to dissuade Blaine from completing the stunt, asking, 'Do you need to do this?' Blaine, on the other hand, seems self-assured and confident, weaving his way through people and equipment, asking if everybody is okay and dispensing pats on the shoulder. Although the catch is framed as risky, it is clearly an element of a text that has been previewed, edited, and packaged for television, meaning that viewers can reasonably assume the effect will have an entertaining rather than deadly outcome. Like with the street magic specials, the rhetoric of liveness is engaged while the actual unpredictability and messiness of the live has been expunged from the text, so that audiences are free to enjoy the pleasures of witnessing Blaine's risk-taking in action without being concerned for their own or Blaine's safety. *What is Magic?* responds to prior failures by repeatedly restaging risk in a hypermediated text that refers back to performance magic traditions, once more troubling the demarcation between fiction and reality.

Both the street magic specials and Blaine's durational performances therefore stage an encounter that can be approached as a re-enchantment of the familiar urban environments where they take place, an intervention in everyday life. The inclusion of spectators' reactions and the location of the street are part of the appeal, signalling that the street magic encounter is taking

place in 'real' space and time. The presence of other people mediates Blaine's effects, whether they be spectators calling into question their reality status, medical personnel establishing the risks to Blaine's body, or press or security communicating the gravity of his durational events. The capacity of television to represent real people and places is mobilised in the street magic specials to generate a 'feeling of unmediation' (Ellis 12), that paradoxically seeks to multiply media while erasing it. Their presence upon screen is a powerful way of staging reality. However, in representing those people and places that are not subsumed into the category of everyday life, like celebrities or inhabitants of the developing world, the fictional dimensions of Blaine's magic are prioritised over the real.

Meanwhile, the durational events bring together 'live' performance and technological mediation, so that they can be encountered by audiences both at a specific place and time, and as remediated images in a television text. Blaine is continually established as the sole causal agent of the extraordinary events featured, and his body is represented as the container of mysterious power. Hence, the rupture that occurs when the fiction of his superhuman body appears to publicly disintegrate, and the need to recuperate his reputation not just as a worker of wonders, but the embodiment of wonder. Through their extensive duration, *Above the Below* and *Dive of Death* both make visible the unseen drudgery of television, the condensing of hundreds of hours of footage into a single spectacular event. Where the reality status of the event is foregrounded, as with *Above the Below*, mediation augments the event and provides transparency so that viewers can obtain a 'close up' of Blaine's body throughout his endurance feats. In the discourses of contemporary popular television, 'reality' becomes a resource to generate affective intensity, and its construction is complex and shifting. This provides the context against which people's reactions to unexpected events can become entertainment for viewers, and Blaine's suffering body can be read as a product of media culture and traditions of performance and display. Where the contingency of Blaine's encounter with the public is exposed, as in *Dive of Death*, this can be literally remedied through remediation, to produce a text that reaffirms his superhuman capabilities and heroic body.

Where Blaine uses an abstract notion of the street as a resource to contrast with his exceptional body, the following chapter will explore how the English performer Dynamo stages an identity that is derived from and attached to the street as a social and performance space that communicates 'realness'. Dynamo's work prefers to focus the shows around staging his own identity as an ascending star who nevertheless manages to 'keep it real'. Rather than an

enchantment of 'the everyday', which suggests a naturalised, shared understanding of the world, Dynamo promises to take the viewer 'on a journey into my world', a specific and intimate experience that mobilises discourses of the real to produce a personal, emotional geography.

4. 'Right now, I'm going to take you on a journey into my world':
crisis, authenticity, and transformation in *Magician Impossible*

*It's night and Dynamo, dressed all in black from head to toe and wearing a heavy, puffy coat, stands on a pavement among a group of people. The lighting and ambient movement behind the group indicates a street of bars and restaurants; I recognise it as London's Greek Street. A multiple-camera setup is used, with one camera capturing the following effect as a master shot, and the second camera providing close-ups of spectators' reactions. Dynamo asks one black male spectator (A), 'Look, can you do me a favour, yeah? Can you finish off the bottle of drink?', gesturing to the bottle of Corona beer that A is holding. It's practically empty but A, keen to play along, exaggeratedly empties the bottle's last drops onto the pavement before handing it to Dynamo. Dynamo shows the bottle to the first camera and announces, 'I want to try something with a mobile phone'. A, a little anxiously, reaches into his pocket and hands over his phone. Dynamo holds the bottle in his left hand and the phone in his right, commanding, like Blaine, that the group (and the viewer) 'Watch'. Swiftly, he brings the objects together so that his hands meet, in a way that surely ought to smash them both on impact- but a further movement of his hands, peeling them back from the bottle to suggest 'ta-dah!', reveals that the phone has somehow penetrated the bottle's glass and is now inside it. He hands the bottle and phone back to A and walks out of shot, while the other spectators gather to inspect the bottle, shaking it and holding it up to the camera. As the phone begins to ring, and A wonders aloud if he's going to have to break the bottle to get it out, another male spectator- white, with an accent that sounds Eastern European (B)- demands to Dynamo, 'Do my phone as well, mate'. Dynamo takes the phone in his right hand and brings his hands to meet in the same gesture as before. This time, he rubs his palms together and shows them empty. The phone has vanished. Dynamo steps back out of shot and reminds B, 'Sorry. You asked for it'. The other spectators find this funny and as B realises what has happened and begins to laugh with them, A tells him, 'You just got jacked!', implying he's been the victim of theft, to which B responds, 'Hey, it's only worth twenty pounds, it's not worth it!' Cut to a second camera showing A struggling for the words to describe the event, saying 'I'm so confused... That's amazing, I'm so confused. How did he do that?' Meanwhile, Dynamo has apparently disappeared into the night. (From the author's notes on the 'England' episode of *Magician Impossible*)*

This description of Dynamo's 'phone-in-a-bottle' effect shows clear influences from Blaine's early street magic specials. These include the use of close-up magic, the 'showcasing' of ordinary people, and filming in real places with no apparent built set (Sexton, 'Deception Reality' 27-8). In *Magician Impossible*, the street magic show starring Dynamo from which the case studies for this chapter are drawn, public spaces are often used as performance venues, and the recruitment of passers-by as participants marks the encounter as spontaneous. A concern with maintaining a fiction of the real is also present in *Magician Impossible*, as it is in Blaine's early street magic. The dramaturgy of the magic effects remains similar to Blaine's street magic specials, consisting of a performance of an effect followed by reaction footage that further underscores the participant's astonishment, thereby adding credibility to the effect and providing a further source of visual pleasure for the viewer. Individual episodes of *Magician Impossible* also follow the climactic structure of Blaine's *Street Magic*, with a final astonishing stunt that reinforces the bodily integrity and potency of the performer, such as a levitation. By expressing such a concentration of power contained within a single body, Blaine and Dynamo 'make themselves available to be perceived as causal agents of effects of impossibility', and 'also present themselves as proxies for explanation' (Rolfe 585). Yet, much changed in the intervening years between the first broadcast of *Street Magic* in 1997 and the 2011 inaugural episode of *Magician Impossible* that precludes an understanding of the series as straightforwardly derivative.

For example, as a twenty-first century celebrity Dynamo is required to have a presence across multiple media platforms, and he has been highly productive within this celebrity economy. As well as *Magician Impossible*, he has worked across a range of media including an immensely popular global tour (*Seeing is Believing*, 2015- present), an autobiography (*Nothing is Impossible*, 2013), and music videos for the rock band The Raconteurs ('Hands', 2006) and grime artist Dizzee Rascal ('Flex', 2007). His past work takes various artistic and commercial directions, from the low production values of *Dynamo's Underground Magic* (2006), an independently produced DVD featuring Snoop Dogg and Coldplay as spectators, to the highly polished Pepsi Max #LiveForNow campaign which saw him levitate alongside a London bus (2014). Engaging with fans via social media is an aspect of this labour, to which end Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat feeds are maintained under his brand @Dynamomagician. Robert van Krieken writes that celebrity is organised around economies of attention and visibility, pointing to entertainment as well as sport and politics as one of the 'truly elite' sectors, as celebrities in these domains can potentially reach audiences from all other fields of activity (51). Dynamo is one such celebrity; for his audience, he

is a presence in the television schedule, in the ad breaks between programming, and on their phones as they scroll through posts and updates from their social networks. Margaret Morse argues that in expressing a relation 'to "you"' through 'a virtually shared and interactive space', televisual and digital technologies are able to support 'fictions of presence' (16-7). They '*present* virtually shared worlds, unfolding temporally in some relation to our own, if not always actually simultaneously' (Morse 20). Dynamo thus sustains a performance of self between genres of media and interfaces that has the potential to feel 'real'.

Not only has this range of media platforms become associated with the practice of street magic, as it has with all contemporary popular entertainment, but in the intervening years between the initial broadcasting of *Street Magic* and that of *Magician Impossible*, many other magicians have become associated with the form. In the US, these performers include Criss Angel, whose gothic-inflected series *Mindfreak* (2005- 2010) is described on Angel's website as 'the most successful magic show in television history, resulting in more hours of magic during prime time than any other show' ('Criss Angel: *Mindfreak*'). Cyril Takayama achieved renown in Japan and South Korea by taking to the streets of Tokyo to film a number of television specials between 2004 and 2014 that were broadcast across the Japanese channels TV Tokyo and Fuji TV, and the pan-Asian channel AXN Asia ('Cyril Magic'). In the UK, Paul Zenon starred in the street magic special *Paul Zenon- Turning Tricks* in 1999 for Channel 4, and in 2005 published an instructional book entitled *Street Magic*, while Derren Brown (of whom more in the following chapter) adapted the form for mentalism and psychological illusion rather than sleight of hand and physical manipulation in the television series *Mind Control* (2001- 2003). This range of production contexts illustrates the relevance and adaptability of the form of street magic, thanks to which qualities it has become one of televised magic's primary modes of expression in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

Given the insistent presence of media in culture, there is an imperative for performers to develop a brand identity in the twenty-first century that, like Roach's effigy, performs a public intimacy that mediates between the real person and their celebrity persona. Moreover, in its representation of a range of shooting locations *Magician Impossible* demonstrates a concern with the specifics of the 'street', as much as the attractions of the 'magic'. The attractions of the magic trick are supported by representing the 'real world' as it relates to Dynamo's singular biographical narrative and interior psychological world, so the 'street' is mediated through his perspective. As Dynamo suggests through voiceover before the opening titles, 'I'm going to take you on a journey

into *my world*', promising a shared experience of intimacy. Dynamo's 'world' is represented as inherently enchanted, changeable, prone to crisis and to miracles in a way made visible by his magic. This chapter examines how Dynamo's brand identity and the vision of the everyday world in which he operates is drawn together from a range of discourses of fiction and reality borrowed from popular media. It discusses *Magician Impossible* in relation to live-action superhero movies and narratives of crisis, a 'savvy' (Andrejevic 132) resistance to enchantment that has been conceptualised in relation to reality television, the performative gesture of 'keeping it real' to sustain a celebrity self, and representations of 'home' and 'abroad'. It will be argued that these connections to a variety of media contexts cause the fictional and real aspects of Dynamo's persona and his magic to blur together, so creating indeterminacy as to the reality of the televised spectacles.

4.1 'With great power comes great responsibility': a narrative of crisis

A press kit that appears on Dynamo's website articulates the significance of both overtly fictional and realistic modes of representation in *Magician Impossible*:

Over the last five years, Dynamo's ascent from unknown, *working class magician*, hailing from the poverty stricken Delph Hill estate on the outskirts of Bradford, to multi award-winning, global superstar, has been nothing short of miraculous. The closest thing to a real life, comic book, [sic] *superhero*, Dynamo has walked (on water) across the river Thames, levitated in front of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro and walked down the outside of the L.A times building. ('Dynamo Biography 2017', emphasis mine)

The juxtaposed terms 'working class magician' and 'superhero' offer a rich combination of references through which to read Dynamo's works. In an interview, Dynamo cites superhero movies as inspiration for his illusions, drawing a connection between his impossible feats and those represented on screen: 'I love watching superhero movies, they're my favourites. And I always get crazy ideas from [sic] them because superheroes have abilities that normal humans don't. And as a magician it's my job to do those sort of things' ('Dynamo: I Want to be a Superhero'). At a performance at Birmingham's Barclaycard Arena during Dynamo's 2015 tour, an 'origin story' of sorts was staged as an animation that appeared on a large screen above the stage. This was drawn in the two-dimensional style of a comic book, and featured a young Dynamo being

menaced by bullies before gaining the powers he needed to stand up to them (*Seeing is Believing*). Dynamo's persona is thus made available to be read through this pre-existing tradition of fiction that has connotations with visual spectacle, and in which protagonists possess extraordinary embodied power.

As Daniel Hassler-Forest notes:

the superhero's powers, which consist either of supernatural physical abilities (Superman, Spider-Man) or a fantasy of unlimited capital (Batman, Iron Man) make him a figure of empowerment and agency in a world of consumers who are defined by their lack of these very qualities. (89)

As a celebrity magician, Dynamo could be considered to possess both the 'powers' of 'supernatural physical abilities' and the 'fantasy of unlimited capital', which confer upon him a particularly active form of 'empowerment and agency'. One of the notable ways in which this agency is expressed in *Magician Impossible*, is in opening up urban space to him in ways that are inaccessible to ordinary people. According to Scott Bukatman, superheroes are 'vehicles of urban representation' (195) but are 'homebodies as much as homeboys' (170), perching on the rooftops of the city and surveying the activity below to adopt the position of 'watchful protector' as in *The Dark Knight* (2008). The traditions of live-action superhero films are thus especially resonant in an episode of *Magician Impossible* which is set in New York City ('New York'), a location that is represented in such films, either as itself or in character (Gotham, Metropolis etc.), as 'the archetypal modern metropolis' (Hassler-Forest 74). In the case study episode, Dynamo's extraordinary 'empowerment and agency', expressed in his powers of access and mobility, are not explicitly deployed in service of protecting the status quo from villainous threats. Nevertheless, the narrative of the episode is influenced by popular media that depict such figures as upholding social order by intervening in events that threaten to destabilise it. *Magician Impossible* thus recycles and repurposes the thematic and narrative conventions of live-action superhero films by foregrounding a moment of crisis in an urban setting that Dynamo works to resolve.

Superhero texts tend to imagine the 'the daunting environment of the metropolis' in a dualistic manner, 'glorifying the American city as a nostalgic and utopian space, while simultaneously expressing anxieties about the dangers associated with the urban jungle' (Hassler-Forest 74). Informed by conventions of superhero films, the city in this episode is similarly represented as both enchanted and endangered. Dynamo's voiceover intones at the start of the

New York episode, 'Scratch beneath the surface, and you'll find something special. A place where magic really exists'. As the episode unfolds, it becomes clear that this magic resides in the city's power to transform itself and its inhabitants, as celebrated by artists from Frank Sinatra ('I'll make a brand new start of it in old New York') to Jay-Z and Alicia Keys ('these streets will make you feel brand new, big lights will inspire you'). Rather than a disenchanted place in need of wonder, as it appears in David Blaine's street magic specials, the city here is represented as replete with magic, crackling like electricity underneath its surfaces. What better tour guide to accompany the viewer around the city than Dynamo, who can make these energies visible by performing magic on its streets?

In New York, Dynamo displays an 'insider' status, showing his familiarity with the city by knowing which cool independent stores to shop in 'whenever I'm in town', and commenting that the city has changed since his first trip there (although the nature and degree of these changes are not specified). This 'insider' status showcases the city's heritage of sport, music, and fashion through particular venues and boutiques, and Dynamo seemingly improvises his magic with objects discovered in each of these environments. One encounter in the storied Rucker Park is structured around a friendly game of basketball with people playing there. Two of the group of spectators demonstrate their skills by spinning a ball upon a single finger, to which Dynamo appreciatively notes, 'That's sick', and asks to be passed the ball, then appears to elongate it by squeezing with his bare hands, transforming it from a sphere into the oval shape of an American football. He invites the spectators to handle the transformed ball, and they unsuccessfully try to push it back into its former shape, even experimentally tossing it as they would a football. In a downtown record shop, Dynamo performs an effect with several stages. He asks an employee to secretly choose an album on display, determines the chosen vinyl, causes it to levitate from its place in the display, then, shaking the record in his hands, reveals that it has changed places with one hung on the wall of the shop. The spectator handles the vinyls and shakes them in a recreation of Dynamo's gesture, concluding, 'It's kinda just, like, blowing my mind right now'. In a clothing store, Dynamo asks a spectator to choose a favourite pair of sneakers displayed behind a glass panel set into the floor, instructs him to imagine that he is pinching its laces in his fingers, and causes the laces of the sneakers to unravel. The 'found' objects of basketball, record, and sneakers are all desired by the spectators for their potential as instruments of activity and consumption. They are also emblematic of the heritage that makes New York so desirable. Yet these desired objects are also shown to be elastic, available to be transformed, transposed, and manipulated,

in a way that demonstrates their *lack of* value when compared to the astonishing encounter of the magic trick. It seems that the latent magic of the city is working through Dynamo, expressed through these small marvels, inviting spectators to see the insubstantial and illusory nature of the material world in favour of more meaningful (because transient) experiences.

At the same time, in the twenty-first century the 'anxieties' and perceived 'dangers' of the city to which Hassler-Forest refers now include the prospect of terror attacks, with which the genre of live-action superhero films has become highly preoccupied. One way such texts have responded to the trauma of the attacks of 11 September 2001 is by repeatedly re-staging them, except in these restagings the 'catastrophic threats' are 'narrowly averted, thereby re-writing this history as one of triumph instead of one of defeat' (Hassler-Forest 74). According to Jeffrey A. Brown, '[o]ne of the reasons why superhero movies have been appealing for audiences is because they are fantastical, escapist metaphors for 9/11 without ever addressing it as an actual historical event' (64).¹² For J. A. Brown, this persistent trope is linked to America's imagining of itself: 'there may be damage, the hero may be wounded, but at the end of the day the superhero and America are still standing' (66). The extravagant scenes of destruction visited on Manhattan in *Avengers Assemble* (2012) and *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) express the trauma of the attacks but also 'allow enough distance for audiences to enjoy the fictional reenactment and more positive resolution' (J. A. Brown 65). In these accounts, the re-staging of the attacks is a cathartic response that rewrites history to shore up a cultural identity based upon cycles of crisis and renewal, and this episode of *Magician Impossible* can be read as performing a similar gesture.

The New York episode of *Magician Impossible* happened to be filmed just as Hurricane Sandy struck the city in 2012. The circumstances here are reminiscent of David Blaine's *Dive of Death*, which was also disrupted by unfavourable weather conditions and so spectacularly exposed the contingencies of live television. In *Magician Impossible*, though, the arrival of the hurricane is placed at the centre of the text, so mirroring the repetitions of destruction followed by renewal as seen in live-action superhero films and contributing to the post-9/11 mythology of New York as a traumatised but resilient city. As with the 'found objects', this suggests an ability to respond to one's performance circumstances and environment by improvising. In one sense, this crisis represents a test of Dynamo's claim to super-heroic power and agency, since this

¹² J.A. Brown notes that this trend is specific to live-action films, while comics and other media that feature superheroes have been more critical of America's role in the destabilization of global security (67).

extraordinarily disruptive and destructive event demands that such an extraordinary individual make use of his abilities to mount a response. As the much-quoted line in *Spider-Man* (2002) has it, 'With great power comes great responsibility'. As the episode continues, New York becomes besieged by a terrifying and unyielding force that threatens to engulf it. A sense of anticipation is thus introduced: how will Dynamo use his powers to come to the city's aid?

The notion of New York as the desirable locus of international cool is now under threat, and the narrative of the show is rerouted to participate in a narrative of crisis and renewal that is reflected by the hypermediated modes of its storytelling. A news anchor appears throughout the episode, at first intermittently and then more frequently, to offer updates on Hurricane Sandy's progress towards the city. Even so, the spirit of New York and New Yorkers as resilient in the face of adversity is emphasised, as the Coney Island Halloween parade goes on as scheduled, and costumed revellers (including some dressed as supervillain stalwarts Catwoman and the Riddler) are depicted as filling the streets of Midtown Manhattan. Eventually, news footage, segments recorded by Dynamo's crew, and apparently found footage are used to represent Sandy's arrival in a bricolage lasting only ninety seconds, the range of visual styles cut together giving the effect of an authentic 'messiness' that conveys the disruption wreaked on the city. As the crisis escalates, images of sandbags give way to those of emergency vehicles, to satellite footage and weather maps, to police cordons, flooded underpasses and wrecked houses in the aftermath. Some of the images, such as addresses from the mayor and interviews with residents, appear cropped and slightly convex, as though the camera were directed at a television screen on which the footage is playing. One clip appears to be from a camera phone, capturing rising water in someone's home. The videography of these events takes place partially at ground level, showing ambulances rushing past on the street, and sometimes offers aerial views of the destruction. This mixtape of disaster cannot help but allude to the much deadlier event of 9/11 that shook the city more than ten years previously.

Though these attacks are never explicitly mentioned in the episode, they are present in the narrative of renewal that structures it, where crisis is managed by extraordinary individuals so as to uphold the social order as in J. A. Brown's analysis. Perhaps to this end, or to avoid directly comparing the two events, the episode references the wreckage of the urban environment as the primary consequence of Hurricane Sandy. For example, Dynamo comments that 'the city that never sleeps... just stopped', and in the sequence described above, the destruction wrought is limited to the gigantic but inert surfaces of the city that can be patched up with more glass and

concrete, rather than the irreplaceable lives lost. This mode of representation is similar to the media images associated with 9/11 according to Mikita Brottman, who notes the lack of 'explicit horror' in the photographs and news footage that documented the attacks, so that the damage done was represented not in terms of gory harm to human bodies, but that of property and architecture (166). Even in the harrowing 'Falling Man' photograph taken by Richard Drew, an instance where a human body is at the centre of 9/11 iconography, the lack of graphic violence allows it to be read in a number of ways that are reminiscent of Blaine's endurance stunts: 'some people who look at the picture see stoicism, willpower, a portrait of resignation; others see something else—something discordant and therefore terrible: freedom' (Junod), the tragedy of the figure at the centre of the photograph abstracted from his real human life. With the narrative of literal death absent from the show, ideas of hope and renewal are soon introduced as the clean-up efforts commence, including a magic effect involving huge numbers of people, designed to affirm the connecting power of technology.

Representing the magician as an intermediary between the forces of nature and human engineering provides a way for *Magician Impossible* to address the crisis of the hurricane while sustaining the fiction of Dynamo's extraordinary power. In a final stunt at the end of the episode set in Times Square, he causes spectators' mobile phones to ring spontaneously. In this sequence, Dynamo instructs the spectators around him to hold up their phones and 'focus', while he lowers his head, stretches his hands out and breathes deeply as though preparing to channel a powerful energy. One by one, the phone screens around him begin to light up and ringtones start to sound until eventually a trilling, beeping soundscape emerges. As the episode cuts to the astonished, puzzled, and delighted faces of the spectators, some holding their phones to their ears with no indication of what is coming from the other end, Dynamo is shown remaining in the same position of concentration. Once the ringing stops, he disappears into the crowd while the cameras remain, capturing spectators' accounts of what they have just seen. One woman says, 'I was right here, and I heard everyone's phone ringing', another says 'I was, like, looking around and everyone was freaking out!'. Here, ordinary people are performing the familiar street magic function of confirming that an extraordinary event has really taken place.

As the narrative of a politically motivated, co-ordinated violation by America's enemies is absent, Dynamo's response is less about mounting a violent counter-strike culminating in a cathartic battle where the heroes triumph due to their superior physical and moral strength, as appears in live-action superhero films, and more a gesture of affirmation that celebrates

enchantment. The crisis of Hurricane Sandy is represented as apolitical, only perhaps indirectly traceable to human activity and its impact on the environment, rather than the effect of the malevolent will of an Other. As such, order can be restored swiftly and without the need for the programme to further interrogate what happened, who to blame, or how it could have been prevented. New York, meanwhile, appears as an undifferentiated crowd represented by those in Times Square, constructed as having a common goal to overcome and united in wonder by Dynamo's illusion.

As a uniting gesture, the effect has a powerful message of solidarity based on the capacity of technology to connect humanity, with human ingenuity surmounting forces of nature. The object of the mobile phone itself is resonant within the context of crisis, since they are items reached for during disasters to contact loved ones. Even outside this context, they are perhaps enchanted objects that perform their functions without users fully understanding how they work. While they can be seen as intrusive, zombifying and even malicious, mobile phones can also form 'a part of the extended self' as users become 'attached' to them 'in a prosthetic sense' (Belk 1106). As a mysterious, powerful, and intimate technology, mobile phones represent the hope of renewal and transformation in the face of disaster, showing that the 'magic' of the city's resilience resides in its less tangible dimensions- its communications infrastructure, and a shared capacity for enchantment, which enable it to survive the onslaughts of nature.

Mobile communications technologies facilitate Richard Sennett's notion of the public realm, namely an urban environment that is characterised by indeterminacy, openness, and possibility that offers its citizens 'a chance to lighten the pressure of conformity, of fitting into a fixed role in the social order' (261). This notion places the 'public realm' of the city, defined by Sennett as 'a place where strangers meet', not only as a material, spatial reality of 'squares, major streets, theaters, cafes, lecture hall, government assemblies, [and] stock exchanges', but as 'radically altered' through communications technologies such that 'the public realm can be found in cyberspace as much physically on the ground' (Sennett 261). Creating 'a place where strangers meet' happens not only on a material level, in places such as Times Square, but in digital media practices of which mobile phones are emblematic. This iteration of the public realm is less tangible, and perhaps therefore more resilient, as it depends less upon architecture and more upon the city's communications infrastructures as well as the media practices of its citizens. The reassuring narrative resolution to the episode is that modern urban humanity, represented by the city of New York, can move forward from disaster, represented by Hurricane Sandy. Though this

episode reveals the contingency of filming for television, the ease with which it can be disrupted by catastrophe, it also demonstrates the enchanting capacity of the medium to transform this catastrophe into a narrative that affirms a positive message about the human spirit.

The thematic conventions of superhero films, which revolve around crisis and a subsequent restoration of social order, are thus repurposed in *Magician Impossible* as a way of highlighting Dynamo's extraordinary power and agency, framing his magic as an intervention in the identity of the city. Yet Dynamo's indication that he gets his 'crazy ideas' ('Dynamo: I Want to be a Superhero') from contemporary superhero films perhaps inadvertently undermines *Magician Impossible's* claims to reality. The amazing feats depicted in such films are not primarily generated through the efforts of the human body, but function as 'a perfect canvas for showcasing amazing digital technologies that can bring viewers to the multiplex time and again' (J. A. Brown 11). It has been argued that superhero films '[replace]' the human body on the screen with 'photorealistic digital doubles' of protagonists that 'clearly [have] no existence outside of the digital realm' (Hassler-Forest 88). For Hassler-Forest, the ability of superheroes such as Spider-Man to 'transcend the physical limitations of the contemporary city-dweller provides a pleasing fantasy of empowerment', but 'the fundamentally non-human ontological status of the character simultaneously short-circuits the experience', such that the attraction of live-action superhero texts stems from the capacity of computers to simulate dazzling images rather than the capabilities of the human body (88). It can perhaps be countered that the abstraction of superhero feats from the human bodies that seem to perform them may not, in fact, be always 'clear' especially to younger viewers. Even if this is 'clear' to the viewer, it remains possible that they could suppress their scepticism and suspend their disbelief for the duration of the film. However, the issues raised by J. A. Brown and Hassler-Forest in their analysis are pertinent to contemporary televised magic: namely, how to respond to the potential critique that magic effects too are abstracted from a recognisable reality due to digital sleight of hand. The following section suggests that *Magician Impossible* addresses this position through purposefully anticipating and creating space for sceptical responses.

4.2 'Reality is what you make it': anticipating savvy critiques

In the previous chapter on Blaine's street magic, the dramatic conceit established was that the magician's feats are performed using physical or psychological methods that are

happening in real time, without using covert means such as confederates, an environment set up prior to the encounter, editorial interference, or, indeed, special effects enabled by digital technology. Without this emphasis on the real, the pleasures of 'detached credulity' (Landy, 'Modern Magic' 110) may be too far stretched, and be subsumed into a savvy certainty where the viewer reflexively refuses to be 'duped' by the clearly unreal spectacles, instead turning their efforts towards assessing 'what is "really going on"' (Andrejevic 132). To recap Andrejevic's arguments regarding savviness,¹³ a savvy viewer "'recognises" behind every promise of truth or authenticity the reality of an illusion' (133), opposing themselves to naïve 'dupes' who perceive factual television to depict an unmediated reality (137). Savviness thus stems from the notion that everyday life is composed of illusions masquerading as reality. This can sometimes be the response to magic effects that foreground their fictionality, such as David Copperfield's televised disappearance of the Statue of Liberty in 1983 ('David Copperfield- Vanishing the Statue of Liberty'). This effect seemed so audacious and compelling that in 2017 the radio programme *This American Life* devoted part of an episode on performance magic, titled 'The Magic Show', to investigating and verifying the method. Copperfield's spectacle is so clearly unreal that it invites assessment of 'what is "really going on"' rather than 'detached credulity', even thirty-four years after its broadcast.

In street magic programmes, the events played out on the screen invite viewers to engage with them as 'really' taking place, but savvy or otherwise critical and sceptical modes of engagement are by no means foreclosed. *Magician Impossible* seems to anticipate the savvy evaluations of viewers accustomed to the digitally augmented, fantastical bodies of live-action superheroes and the stagings of factual television, one potential critique being that Dynamo's methods *really* take place in post-production, outside the frame of the camera. Two case studies will be discussed in this section that foreground Dynamo's mobility and agency, but that also acknowledge their status as mediated fictions, so allowing space for viewers to practice 'detached credulity' (Landy, 'Modern Magic' 110) as well as savvy certainty. The first case study is a sequence that occurs at the finale of the first episode of the first series, titled 'England', in which Dynamo walks across the river Thames. The second example is from the finale of the episode 'Bradford', the final show of the fourth and last season, a point at which Dynamo's persona has reached its fullest realisation. These sequences would both fall into Sexton's category of the climactic

¹³ A fuller discussion of 'savviness' can be found in section 2.4 of this thesis.

‘mediatised “marvel”’, ‘coded’ as transparently mediated (‘Deception Reality’ 35). Reading them paratactically shows how *Magician Impossible* stages a teasing game by alternately promising and frustrating access to the real. The show takes the savvy premise that illusion and fiction are a part of everyday life and plays with this, acknowledging viewers’ desires to know ‘what is “really going on”’ (Andrejevic 132) without allowing them to share Dynamo’s ‘insider’ status.

The first sequence, from ‘England’, opens with Dynamo walking along the Thames’ south bank in a distinctive red, long-sleeved top amidst a crowd of people, towards Westminster Bridge. He opens a wrought iron pair of gates at the top of a set of steps leading down to the river, and proceeds down them to reach a floating pontoon. This is interspersed with partial shots of Big Ben on the north bank and the London Eye on the south bank, both visible from Westminster Bridge. The visual grammar represents these famous landmarks in a way that is continuous with the real spatial relations of London, so orienting those viewers who have enough knowledge of the city to recognise its geographical layout as well as the much broader category of viewers who are more familiar with the iconography of London than its spatial actualities. A wide shot then shows Dynamo stepping from the pontoon and onto the surface of the river with long, unsteady strides, his arms outstretched as though walking along a tightrope. He progresses further and further from the shore, at times standing still with his palms open in a beatific gesture.



Figure 4. Screenshot of Dynamo as he begins to walk on water. From the perspective of Westminster Bridge, with spectators on the south bank visible. All screenshots in this chapter shared with the permission of Phil McIntyre Entertainments.



Figure 5. Close-up of Dynamo walking on the Thames from the perspective of the south bank.

He is passed by two kayakers, followed by a yacht packed with waving and smiling smartly-dressed partygoers- perhaps the maritime equivalent of passing a hoop over the body of the levitating assistant so that spectators can see there are no wires supporting her. Meanwhile, cameras on Westminster Bridge capture the reactions of individuals within the growing crowd gathering to witness this apparently spontaneous, impossible spectacle. Their reactions range from awestruck to joyful; they are silent, they cheer, and they capture the moment by taking pictures of their own. At one moment, a fixed camera shooting from the south bank tilts from the crowd on Westminster Bridge down to Dynamo standing on the water, the tree-lined Victoria Embankment and distinctive golden eagle of the Royal Air Force memorial in the background. At this point, Dynamo's voiceover states, 'Sometimes I wonder if my life has all been an illusion. But if there's anything I've learned, reality is what you make it'. A small, motor-powered boat marked with the word 'POLICE' now appears in the frame, and viewers hear the shouted instruction for Dynamo to 'stay there'. Dynamo obeys, altering the position of his outstretched arms to hold them aloft in surrender as the boat approaches. Cutting to the spectators on Westminster Bridge, the expressions of joy and astonishment in their faces have also altered, to concern or perhaps incredulity. As credits roll, one of the 'police officers' grabs Dynamo's red jacket and pulls him into the vessel, pushing him prone on his back in what seems a rather excessive display of force. The final image to be seen on screen is the police boat speeding out of shot with Dynamo apprehended, the camera lingering over the word 'POLICE', until all that remains is the foaming wake of the vessel.

This sequence contains a number of indications that allow it to be read as both fictional and real, so establishing the dramatic conceit of reality only to playfully and deliberately undermine it. Indications that aspects of the scene are 'real' include the notion that Dynamo is potentially breaking the law (although what charges might be brought against him remain unclear) rather than restoring social order, as was his function in the 'New York' episode. The final images of Dynamo ignominiously pushed down to the bottom of the boat suggest subjugation rather than extraordinary power. Moreover, the expressions of disbelief and shock on the faces of the spectators perhaps imply that they no longer consider themselves witnesses to an impossible event, but to an apparently unsafe or illegal act that would require such a response. The dramatic plot of the sequence therefore suggests an interruption to the illusion's narrative of unbounded agency and freedom, so that reality in the form of state intervention intrudes on the scene. The miraculous act of walking on water and subsequent persecution by authorities

summons Christ-like iconography, which can be read as a gesture towards the desire for salvation in a turbulent, post 9/11 world as discussed in section 4.1. In her essay on the desire for surveillance and salvation that superheroes manifest, but also occasionally critique, Rebecca Wanzo notes that, '[t]he Christian God is not an explicit presence in the superhero universe. In fact, the worlds might be interpreted as lacking a God since the heroes with godlike power shape humanity's destiny' (94). As the effect is set not in a fictional superhero universe but the 'real' world in which miracles are real to some believers, Dynamo's allusion to God-like power might be interpreted as a challenge to Christian faith. However, given the secular context of the rest of the programme, it can also be seen as a playful, provocative gesture not intended to be taken seriously, rather to create a memorable, culturally resonant image that draws attention to the indeterminacy of its reality.

Yet, read as a televised magic effect, a fiction that contains a fiction, a different interpretation emerges. It seems probable that whatever structure or apparatus is supporting Dynamo, concealed beneath the surface of the water, may extend only partially across the breadth of the river. The police pickup may therefore be part of the method, justifying his stopping in that particular spot rather than venturing further across the water. This lends an intriguing cast to the statement 'reality is what you *make it*' that directly precedes the part of the sequence with the police boat. Read in this light, the formulation hints that this apparent scene of 'reality' has been orchestrated, or 'made', by Dynamo. Rather than an intervention by outside state forces, this reading suggests that Dynamo's extraordinary agency is expressing itself by managing the entire scenario, not just the feat of walking on water that is overtly framed as illusion.

In this case study, the awed spectators are positioned as 'dupes', unable to see outside the contrivances of the illusion and its fiction of the real. Viewers, on the other hand, are not only aware that they are witnessing an event framed as a magic effect, but as the above analysis shows, are invited to engage with the reality status of a range of aspects of the scene. As some elements of this sequence are signalled clearly as fiction to the viewer (the magic effect of walking on water) and some elements more ambiguously so (the police pickup), the sequence gestures to, without confirming, the savvy suspicion that reality- especially mediated versions of reality- is largely staged (Andrejevic 132). It acknowledges viewers' desire to know 'what is "really going on"' (Andrejevic 132), but obscures the method with the police encounter, and then teasingly suggests that this too is another element of illusion. At the same time as it foregrounds its fictions, this moment also places boundaries around Dynamo's extraordinary agency. It does not stretch

credulity too far, as might the digitally enhanced bodies of live-action superheroes and David Copperfield's feats of disappearance by implying that they are capable of literally anything. The second case study to be examined in this section also anticipates sceptical or savvy responses, foregrounding the selectivity of media apparatus in a teasing way that nevertheless allows a broad appeal for viewers who may respond differently.

The climax of the 'Bradford' episode is a levitation above the Shard building in London. Photos and videos of this feat were released nearly a month prior to broadcasting, perhaps to build interest and provoke speculation about the method. The levitation is introduced at the top of the episode in a segment featuring Dynamo's interview with a Sky News reporter, as she gestures towards a photograph of the effect and asks the savvy question, 'We can see the wires, is that how you did it?' This is followed by an immediate cut to the title sequence so that viewers never learn Dynamo's response. During the levitation, Dynamo appears to rise serenely from the summit of the Shard with no visible means of support. He hovers over the London skyline against a bright grey overcast sky, as if taking in the view.

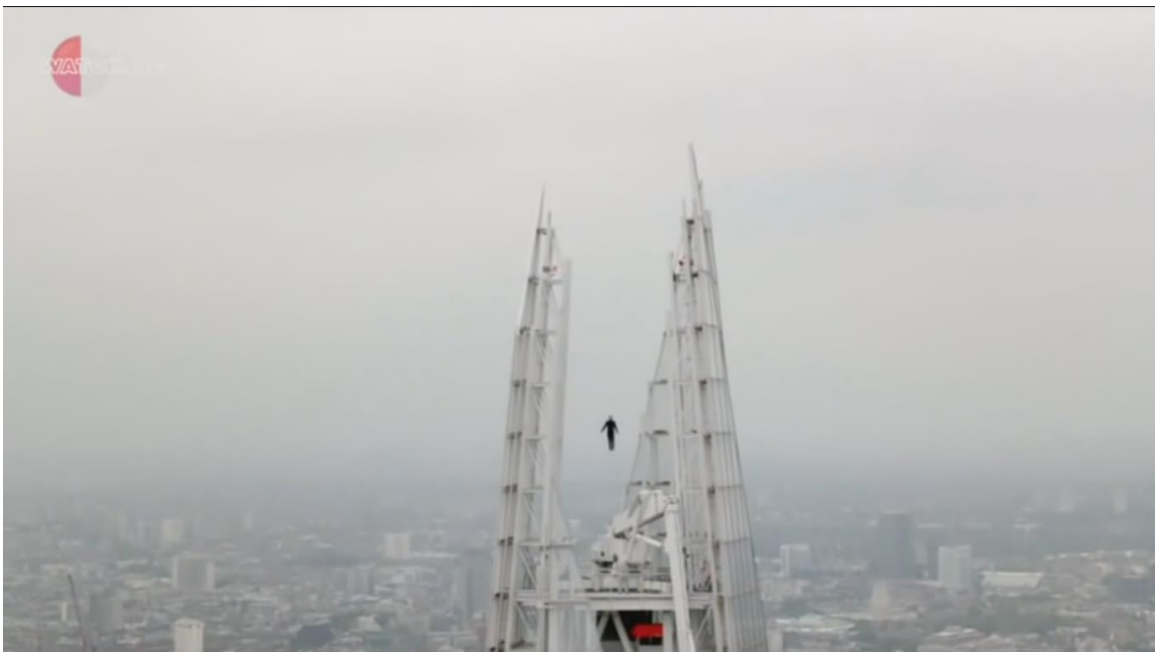


Figure 6. Screenshot of Dynamo rising above the Shard building.

This dreamlike image is explicitly constructed as an attempt to highlight the 'magic' of everyday life; one spectator in a construction worker's uniform of hard hat and high-vis vest comments, 'I come to work and I see a bloke floating in the middle of the air... It just hits you, d'you know what I mean, maybe... magic does exist'. In this instance, the spectator does not appear to be positioned as a 'dupe' with its negative connotations, but a privileged witness who has experienced something extraordinary. The effect may be amplified by the onlooker's uniform, implying that even a figure bearing such vestments of masculine practicality and common sense is not immune to Dynamo's astonishing skill. Now, the reporter's savvy question, 'Is that how you did it?' seems to be missing the point. It seems clear that the intended purpose of the effect is to evoke a feeling, not to scrutinise how it is done.

Yet this is not the end of the mystery. The very final minute of the 'Bradford' episode reveals somebody opening a laptop and manipulating images that appear to be frames from the footage of the levitation, a mug on the desk bearing the slogan 'I ♥ Bradford' suggesting that this may be Dynamo himself. Where one might expect the apparatus used to achieve the levitation to be edited out of the image, this person seems to be drawing in wires where previously there were none. As with the illusion of walking on the Thames, this sequence deepens the mystery behind the effect, teasing the savvy viewer that the moment of deception is taking place somewhere outside their vision, and challenging them to reconstruct the method for themselves. Instead of stretching viewers' credulity by suggesting that Dynamo is capable of literally anything, the gesture places limits on the potential of his performances while refusing to provide them with answers. In this way, it appeals to a viewer's savvy desire to position themselves as 'insiders' (Andrejevic 132), who are aware that there must be a deceptive method behind the spectacle but are unable to locate it. Moreover, this playful gesture also draws attention to the media apparatus that enables the trick to take place. It does this by seeming to confirm the notion that the magic in street magic is achieved by manipulating the images in the editing suite, but then frustrates this by showing a sequence of events that does not match viewers' expectations.

It also explicitly situates Dynamo's work within a media culture that operates through deception, engaging with deeper issues of trust in the media and highlighting the potential for misinformation. In this final sequence, Dynamo the magician becomes a composite of performer and editor who has apparently been directing the narrative of speculation surrounding the stunt since it became public knowledge. The reality status of the Sky News interview clip as a source of unbiased external commentary is then complicated by the fact that the interview appears within

the context of the programme, so may itself have been staged. In this way, Dynamo's street magic is able to actively engage with the notion of staged reality in a playful way, reflexively using the notion of the 'magic' of postproduction as a resource to enchant and astonish.

Magician Impossible thus actively anticipates the savvy suspicion that, like in live-action superhero films, Dynamo's magic effects are entirely achieved through digital technology. However, the show does not foreclose the elements of fiction within the text by insisting on the reality of the spectacle. Rather, it works to open up multiple layers of fiction and reality to which viewers can respond. Viewers can enjoy the spectacles of walking on water and levitation as a display of extraordinary power and agency as they might enjoy watching Spider-Man whizzing around New York, and/or practice a 'detached credulity' (Landy, *Modern Magic* 110) that attempts to discern which elements of the spectacle are real and which are fiction, and/or give themselves over to the savvy pleasures of imagining others 'duped'. From here, this chapter will further trace the tensions between fiction and reality in *Magician Impossible* by exploring how modes of 'realness' are articulated and sustained within the show, arguing that these are negotiated, in part, through the practice of 'keeping it real'. Here, 'realness' emerges less as an ontological category, that might be opposed to 'fakeness', and more as a resource for staging celebrity identity, so further thickening the ambiguity of reality and fiction in Dynamo's performances.

4.3 'Keeping it real': Dynamo's performance of authenticity

'Keeping it real' can be understood as a function of the 'practice of intimacy in public' that defines celebrity culture (Roach 16), a form of secular magic that operates in everyday life. Jo Littler has explored the imperative to 'keep it real', that is, for celebrities to emphasise their labour while denying that their fame has changed who they are, but also to conspicuously enjoy its benefits. 'Realness' in this context can be defined as a performance referencing an (often deprived or working-class) identity that existed prior to the individual's emergence as a celebrity. For audiences and fans, the practice of 'keeping it real' offers 'a possible way of legitimating themselves by investing in the celebrity world', while for the celebrities, 'it can be a way of connecting and persuading people they have something in common and divesting themselves of their role in creating that disjunction in power' (24). This aligns with Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn's argument that

celebrities and their publicists often have to make the case through autobiography, interview and other recourse to their life stories that they have, indeed, earned their success and their prosperity. In other words, they have to work towards authentication and the assignation of significant value, often through attachments to characteristics of 'realness', labour and classed notions of authenticity. (*Class and Contemporary British Culture* 105)

The phrase 'keep it real' suggests a need to retain something from a former life prior to that of the celebrity persona. As such, Littler identifies 'the moment before fame' as a textual strategy especially employed by celebrity musicians as a way of 'keeping it real', referencing the lyrics to the 2005 track *Jenny from the Block* by the singer J-Lo (Jennifer Lopez), which include the line 'Used to have a little, now I have a lot/ No matter where I go I know where I came from' (15). Littler argues that J-Lo uses her class identity as a backdrop to demonstrate how much she has achieved, how hard she has worked, and how special her talents are, '[using] "the street" to show off her individualised success and beauty' (18). This is not to say that 'keeping it real' involves the best of both worlds- indeed, Biressi and Nunn describe the self-performance of 'someone who has money but does not care about it, who has work but it is work they love, who has been given a lucky break but works hard to sustain it' as a 'tightrope act' with both 'consumerist imperatives and classed investments' to satisfy (*Class and Contemporary British Culture* 104). 'Keeping it real' thus involves a negotiation of past and present selves, to some extent rejecting the artificial affectations of celebrity to fashion a compelling and appealing public persona. Dynamo's street magic can thus be understood as invoking a 'moment before fame' that grounds his effects in the everyday.

Critical readings of reality television are useful for unpacking this 'realness', as scholars have located the 'real' in reality television as a form of intimacy. In *Reality TV, Affect and Intimacy*, Kavka has noted that 'reality TV is both compelling and threatening because these programmes bridge the once-firm division between spectacle and experience, between the staged event and actuality, through mediated intimacy' (24). According to Kavka, television offers a spatial, temporal, and emotional closeness, '[offering] to re-move the viewing subject- not in the sense of informative distantiation, but precisely through its opposite, a collapse of distance and time through the production of affective proximity' (7). In other words, television has a unique capacity for producing intimacy, sustaining a fiction of co-presence between the viewer and the events represented. As Kavka notes, 'real is that which is material (hence palpable to all five senses) but

also social, since intersubjective relations as well as sensible and proprioceptive embodiment make up our experience of the world' (2). Dynamo's promise articulated in voiceover before the opening titles, 'I'm going to take you on a journey into my world', signals that the 'world' of *Magician Impossible* encompasses this social element. While the superhero references summon a fiction concerned with visual spectacle and bodily performance, the drive to 'keep it real' by maintaining continuity with Dynamo's past produces a narrative grounded in a social reality that is familiar to viewers.

Reality television scholarship also offers the useful conceptual tool of 'dedifferentiation', Andrejevic's term for the lack of distinction between entertainment and consumption, leisure and labour that is apparent in reality television (29). Reality television 'transforms the rhythms of daily life into a value-generating activity by virtue of the fact that they can be monitored', such that under these circumstances all activities become work activities, and all time becomes work time (29). In *Magician Impossible*, everyday activities become an aspect of Dynamo's labour as a performer, the gap between his work and leisure time becoming blurred to the extent that he appears to be always working. According to Andrejevic, 'dedifferentiation' is a function of the neoliberal political economy, the effects of which are inescapable in our daily lives (29). *Magician Impossible* thus enacts the familiar rhythms of the everyday, the 'social reality' to which Kavka refers (*Reality TV, Affect and Intimacy* 2). Dedifferentiation is apparent in *Magician Impossible* not only thematically, as Dynamo's 'realness' is used to support his celebrity persona, but also through the use of multiple types of media, notably home video from the family archive. The fluidity of video sustains the fiction of 'keeping it real' more completely, since the use of home and professional modes allows a movement between personal and impersonal types of footage within the same text.

For example, a home video montage opens the episode 'Bradford', featuring a teenaged Dynamo performing sleight of hand magic and smiling family members greeting the camera, giving way to stock footage of a plane taking off. The trajectory towards stardom is signalled not only by the ascending plane but also the improved picture quality. The following sequence of clips shows a Miami beach, the Austrian alps, townships in South Africa, and so on in a visual summary of previous episodes. This establishing sequence offers a varied palette of production values, as the grainy, muted representations of family life in England give way to a glossy, high-definition, colourful present that is constantly shifting and changing from place to place. As these images play out, Dynamo's West Yorkshire accent intones his intention to return to the north of England

in this episode, back to where it all began. He narrates the link between past and present in many instances of reflective voiceover throughout the series, thus becoming an authorial presence mapping the emotional territory of his world. This sequence can be read as performing the 'moment before fame' in Littler's phrasing, so that a previous non-celebrity life is subsumed into Dynamo's celebrity narrative.

Deviating for a moment from the case study episode, the disparity between Dynamo's home life and celebrity world for comic effect is emphasised elsewhere in the series. The sequence at the opening of the first episode of the final season ('England') depicts a few seconds of home footage of young Dynamo before cutting between footage of various appearances on television shows, meeting fans on the red carpet as cameras flash, and popping the cork from a champagne bottle in a glamorous nightclub, as well as close-ups of magazine covers bearing his name and image. All these moments are intercut with footage of Dynamo driving around West London in his black Ferrari. This stream of images depicts the stereotypical trappings of celebrity- Ferrari, camera flash, magazine cover, champagne bottle- all appearing as emblems of the high life to which Dynamo now has access, with funky, brassy music playing over the top. The sequence is interrupted as Dynamo receives a call from his grandmother on the built-in phone in his car and chats with her for a minute. After they say goodbye, the stream of images and the audio resumes, with private planes and racing cars now featuring heavily. Incorporating this playful and affectionate slice of ordinary life into the television text can be read as bringing together Dynamo's past life and his present celebrity status, the fact that he makes time to chat with his grandmother showing his attachment to a prior life before stardom. Or, taking a savvy position, it could be said to show the extent to which his personal life is determined by a shooting schedule, that an apparently spontaneous- but perhaps prearranged- chat can be recruited as material for the show. In either reading, there is no clear differentiation between Dynamo's work and home life; they are both resources for the programme.

The visual syntax of both these sequences is mediated by the formal differences between amateur and professional video, and the mobility of these formats that makes them available to be repurposed. James Moran identifies the 'home mode' as 'the amateur media practice of idealized family representation', distinct from professional practice and avant-garde conventions of representation (xvi). In *Magician Impossible*, the professional video communicates a spectacle ongoing in the present, while the home video is associated with memory in the past. Home video also signifies a rejection of airbrushed perfection, performing a willing exposure of Dynamo's

awkward adolescence and experimentation with performance personas that suggests he does not take his celebrity life too seriously. Yet, both types of media are integrated into one text, undifferentiated from each other, so as to tell a 'life story'. Presumably the home videos were never intended for such a public viewing at the time they were filmed, nor were they intended to be used in a professional product, yet their medium as video enables the sound and images captured in the past to be repurposed in the present. This blending of various media into a seamless whole is aided by the formal indistinguishability of video and television. According to Moran, 'residing side by side in domestic space and borrowing each other's technological garb, video and TV share so many likenesses that we recognize them as sibling media' (97). The distinctions between video and television have become even further blurred with the advent of digital video that can be viewed on a range of devices, from television monitors to mobile phone screens. Digital video can be produced by amateurs and distributed through professional channels, or produced professionally and distributed through easily accessible means such as social media platforms. In *Magician Impossible*, the seamlessness of home and professional video conveys a linear sequence of images that produces a narrative of stardom unfolding in a moment. Magic not only constitutes Dynamo's primary form of labour, but his rise to celebrity as narrated in *Magician Impossible* also possesses a 'magical' fairy-tale quality that depends upon the 'moment before fame' being read as real. The actual means by which Dynamo achieved his fame are obscured, signalled only euphemistically in the home video montage by the ascending plane. However, this is articulated elsewhere. In his autobiography, Dynamo describes his early years as a performer constantly on the lookout for the next gig or opportunity, '[blagging his] way backstage' (125) and charming people through his magic:

There were no Jedi mind tricks at work. It was a mixture of Northern charm, magic, a certain sense of fearlessness and the willingness to stand outside in the freezing cold for hours on end, waiting for a friend to send out a friend of a friend with one of their friend's spare backstage wristbands. (120-1)

The sense of effort and precarity conveyed in this written text is not emphasised in the brief televisual retelling of Dynamo's success story, which is rather concerned with demonstrating the availability of the 'moment before fame' so that he blends celebrity and ordinariness in his magician persona.

As well as the dedifferentiation of home and commercially produced video, a thematic dedifferentiation of work and leisure can also be seen in the 'Bradford' episode. In one sequence,

set in a Manchester bar, Dynamo entertains former boxer Ricky Hatton, who jocularly threatens to 'knock the shit out of him' if he tries an effect with his wallet or watch. Of course, Hatton is complicit in the situation and both men perform to type, as the quiet, unassuming Dynamo placates the hyper-masculine Hatton and his posse of minders by turning a receipt for a round of drinks into a bank note that would cover the bar tab for the group. Later in the episode, Dynamo is shown taking his grandmother to the supermarket, causing the products she selects to fall into her trolley from the high shelves, then paying for her shopping, but not before transforming a bank note into a credit card. These gestures are suffered with loving if exasperated responses. The two transactions represented here, of buying a round of drinks in a bar and paying for the groceries, can be constructed as everyday purchases that sustain various social networks. They seem natural and normal ways of performing the social identities of generous friend and loving grandson. Yet *Magician Impossible* does not acknowledge the difference in nature or intensity of affect that surely exists between the two relationships. Nor does the programme admit to the inherently staged nature of the situation in which these transactions take place. Strikingly, these encounters with their differing levels of intimacy are equally available as material for the show.

Dedifferentiation thus appears as a strategy to 'keep it real', grounding Dynamo's magic effects in a familiar and recognisable reality, and attaching his celebrity self to a 'moment before fame' to be fully legitimated. Television's capacity for blending various media into a single text allows the use of amateur and professionally produced video in *Magician Impossible*, so that the 'realness' of Dynamo's former life appears alongside his magic effects and the glamour of his present celebrity life. These media are not to be read paratactically, as though they represent separate aspects of Dynamo's life, but syntactically, presenting a continuous life story. Dedifferentiation could also describe the merging of Dynamo's working life and home life throughout the show, so that it seems he is always performing. 'Realness' thus emerges from this text as a resource for mediating one's celebrity identity. This could be viewed as a strategy to multiply the discourses of 'realness' in the text, so that as well as evaluating whether an effect 'really' took place as represented, viewers may also consider whether this performance of 'keeping it real' seems convincing. The representation of place in *Magician Impossible* also performs this function of multiplying discourses of 'realness' and fiction, as specific localities are mediated through notions of enchantment, while the fictional status of Dynamo's magic effects is mediated through 'real world' places as they are already familiar to British viewers.

4.4 Imagining 'home' and 'abroad': transformed places

In Blaine's street magic, the 'streets' themselves are differentiated only as the familiar 'everyday' and the mysterious 'elsewhere'. In *Magician Impossible*, Dynamo visits a range of locations, seeking new experiences and spectators, elaborating upon Blaine's persona of the wandering magician. However, notions of place in *Magician Impossible* are built around existing British representations of specific localities, and Dynamo's subjective experience of 'home' and 'abroad'. These strategies are not apparent in Blaine's street magic specials.¹⁴ Through their association with Dynamo, 'home' and 'abroad' both become imbued with enchantment and the potential for transformation, although these exciting possibilities are restrained by the momentary nature of the magic effect. Two case studies will be discussed in this section that propose different notions of transformation appearing in connection with real places. The first is the transformed Bradford, in which *Magician Impossible* seeks to recuperate Bradford's image through foregrounding the efforts of individuals to make a difference within their community, thereby imbuing a place which has been represented as possessing an almost excessive 'realness' of material and cultural impoverishment with magic and possibility.

Gargi Bhattacharyya argues that provincial cities in Britain such as Bradford are excluded from certain spheres of representation through their lack of visibility in either heavy or heritage industries. This is explained as a 'tragedy of small countries' that are organised around one principal metropolitan that receives much of the country's economic and cultural capital, while 'provincial cities get the bad press of urban living... Some places, it seems, are both too industrial and not industrial enough' (Bhattacharyya 163). This does not mean to say that such cities are representational voids; in fact, their marginal status is profoundly significant. For example, Birmingham is described by Bhattacharyya as a 'spectre' haunting Britain's imagination of itself (162), and a 'joke nowhere', characterised by un- or under-employment, lack of culture, and a perceived functional and aesthetic purposelessness (165). In response, Bhattacharyya articulates several more positive ways in which Birmingham imagines itself and is imagined in British culture more broadly, as the defensive underdog (162), a city of dissenters (167), a convivial cosmopolis (169), and a global metropolis (172). Likewise, Bradford occupies a particular place in the British

¹⁴ I was born and raised in England. Aside from the strategies employed within *Magician Impossible* to communicate a sense of 'realness', my sensitivity to this reading is doubtless underscored by my own subjective experience of 'home'.

cultural imagination. In a sense, it is imagined as an anti-London, its relative deprivation and lack of integration being the Other of London's affluence and proclaimed multiculturalism, reinforcing the North-South opposition in England exacerbated by the recent Brexit vote.

In the UK, Bradford's association with deprivation, poor race relations, and people living on the margins is perhaps compounded by a persistent representative mode of 'realness'. This can be seen both in fictional texts such as the ITV drama series *Band of Gold* (1995- 1997), which portrayed the lives of sex workers, and factual television such as the BBC's *Eyes of a Child* (1999) and Channel 4's *Make Bradford British* (2012). *Eyes of a Child* emotively depicted the issue of child poverty on the Delph Hill estate, on which Dynamo grew up. In this documentary, the camera lingers over vandalised and boarded up buildings, rusting shells of cars, and children with dirty faces plaintively describing the nefarious nocturnal activities of the adults around them. *Make Bradford British* drew on the reality television model of 'social experiment', placing people with differing political and religious views in constrained living situations, with the lofty aim of helping participants and viewers learn something, but with the promise of conflict never far away. The programme was premised upon the apparent segregation between various ethnic communities in Bradford, and questioned whether the development of individual relationships between representatives of these communities could be a viable method of integration. Though the 'social experiment' of *Make Bradford British* is far from an unqualified success, the programme ends with a sense of optimism, as the participants discuss the ways in which their points of view have been broadened and the changes they have seen in themselves as a result of the relationships they have formed. Though this latter representation of Bradford ends on a hopeful note, which is absent in the almost post-apocalyptic scenes of *Eyes of a Child*, in both these cases Bradford is problematised as a city that requires fixing, where the realities of the UK's social evils are manifest in especially extreme forms.¹⁵

¹⁵ Though these abject representations may be dominant and persistent, they are by no means uncontested. A local newspaper reported on the 'fury' directed by residents of the estate at the makers of *Eyes of a Child* for portraying the community in such an abject manner, and called for the production team to be made accountable for the harm they had caused ('Film-maker faces full fury of estate'). Community leaders responded to *Make Bradford British* by underlining the 'unfair' stereotype of Bradford as *de facto* segregated, with a representative of the organisation Positive Bradford commenting, 'Why isn't it Make Birmingham British or some other city?... From seeing the trailers, they've done the typical extremist viewpoint. That doesn't represent real Bradford' ('Make Bradford British is "unfair image" of city'). However, a spokesperson for Channel 4 defended their decision to situate the programme in Bradford because 'it is perceived to have one of the more segregated populations in the UK' ('Make Bradford British is "unfair image" of city').

Magician Impossible takes a rather different strategy than the television texts mentioned above, facilitated by the editorial choice to eschew the mode of ‘realness’ that characterises *Eyes of a Child* and *Make Bradford British*, and instead associating Bradford with enchantment and transformation through the figure of Dynamo. This choice perhaps stems from a similar impulse as that identified by Corner in *When the Dog Bites*, discussed in the introduction to this thesis, to find an alternative to documentary realism in portraying marginalised places. The ‘homecoming’ episode of *Magician Impossible* (‘Bradford’) contests the established media narrative of Bradford as a ‘problem’ city. It acknowledges the city’s social and economic issues, but nevertheless portrays the place as populated by citizens determined to forge a better path for themselves. Like Dynamo’s family life prior to his celebrity life, the city is partly seen through grainy home video. The rain-flecked lens of the camera, as it surveys the Delph Hill housing estate, mimics the experience of gazing out of the window on a rainy day, communicating boredom and dreams of a different life elsewhere. Yet this is placed alongside images of activity and community. Footage of Dynamo performing card tricks to crowds is cut with shots of Bradford’s inhabitants dancing and playing in the fountain of the town centre on a sunny day. In following segments, the relative deprivation of the town is emphasised through voiceover, but the narrative quickly becomes more positive as viewers are introduced to a local children’s charity and a centre for children excluded from school, with Dynamo performing at each venue. It is implied that the sense of wonder and possibility that his magic creates potentially allows spectators gathered there to imagine life differently. Representing the city of Bradford as a place populated by a lively community that looks after each other, struggling to lift itself out of poverty and away from its bad reputation through social enterprise, mirrors Dynamo’s ascendancy away from the Delph Hill estate and towards stardom. As with the ‘New York’ episode, these transformative community place-making practices are presented as a strategy of enchantment that already exists, and which are expressed through the astonishing effects of the magician.

Dynamo’s persona is thus aligned with his ‘home’ community, as both seek to actively better themselves. His personal narrative is presented as a parallel narrative to Bradford’s transformation rather than one that is necessarily interrelated, as Dynamo’s personal obstacles

This point about Bradford’s ‘perceived’ segregation and the ‘typical extremist viewpoint’ moves the ground of contention from material reality, the contestable point that *Make Bradford British* was representative of real life experiences lived by real people, to a perceived reality, that people outside the city generally *believe* Bradford to be segregated, a claim that is harder to refute.

are not discussed in terms of broader economic or social circumstances, but individualised misfortunes of bullying and poor health. The narrative of transformation around Bradford suggests it is redeemed by the actions of individuals, charities, and NGOs working to improve the lives of those around them, whose examples are sources of inspiration and hope. Yet the issue of how Bradford became so deprived in the first place, of the wider social problems that may not be solved through the efforts of its citizens, is elided. *Magician Impossible*'s recuperation of Bradford's reputation cites the notion that a better future depends upon the choices of individuals to transform themselves and their community, which also implies that a failure to transform oneself is due to a failure to exercise this choice effectively. The cultural discourse called upon to legitimate this narrative is one of 'self-actualization', the notion that by ceaselessly hustling to earn economic and social capital as Dynamo does, people are able to overcome their personal circumstances and achieve their dreams. This seems to be a self-evident, 'common sense' proposition in a social context that insists that individual attitudes determine success to a greater extent than material realities of people's birth and background.

However, it is a narrative that reflects the dominant values of the show's social context of contemporary economic liberalism. For Biressi and Nunn, the spread of this political system 'depended, in part, on the dissemination of certain *values* as well as practices', such as 'self-improvement, individual responsibility and personal investment, as exemplified in the practice of home-ownership and the privatisation of national industries', and placing the home and family at the heart of policy-making (*Class and Contemporary British Culture* 8). The narratives of *Magician Impossible* are consistent with these values and practices, affirming the capacity of the individual to exercise their agency and invest in themselves to achieve their dreams, and in the episode this is extended to the entire community of Bradford. Though the text presents an uplifting and hopeful attempt to change the discourse around Bradford, the mechanisms for actual social change are perhaps overdetermined by the idea of transformation in a context of economic (neo)liberalism. The enchantments of this particular context are further depicted through *Magician Impossible*'s portrayals of 'abroad' as well as 'home', as can be seen in an episode set in Ibiza, where the possibilities of finding fulfilment and transformation through holiday-making are subsumed into Dynamo's 'my world'.

As suggested in analysis of the 'New York' episode in section 4.1, tourism and travel for leisure are the primary ways in which Dynamo's journeys to places other than Britain are understood. Like the notions of 'home' and 'abroad', tourism itself is a concept that presupposes

its opposite- the everyday practices of 'home' and work' are crucial in understanding the tourist experience (Urry and Larsen 4; 15). John Urry and Jonas Larsen argue that, though there can be no universal tourist gaze, all gazes are 'constructed through signs, and tourism involves the collection of signs' (5), so that television itself opens up possibilities for 'imaginative travel' (23). This can be seen, for example, in the 'gastrodiplomacy' of food travelogues presented by celebrity chefs, which serve the purpose of 'promoting the nation... by representing food in the national context' (Buscemi 46). *Magician Impossible* narratively justifies its various shooting locations through existing tourist practices, staging a 'lads' holiday' in the 'Ibiza' episode, a location that may be aspirational but nevertheless accessible for Dynamo's audience. In referring to structures and practices that may *feel* real to its audience, this episode` further blends the fictions and realities of Dynamo's magic.

Ibiza itself is a location that commonly appears in the British imagination as a signifier for a particularly excessive hedonism centred around partying, music, sex, and drugs. The 'peak' (Wilson 49) of British rave culture that evolved in Ibiza during the summer of 1988, influenced musically by the disco, house, and techno scenes in New York, Chicago, and Detroit, gave way to a more exclusive 'clubculture' that was 'governed less by peace, love, and togetherness, and more by a subcultural class system' where 'it matters what you wear, how you dance, and how you talk' (Wilson 51). Thus, the nominal freedom offered by Ibiza to throw off the burdens of everyday life is circumscribed by various pressures to conform which, for some, may not provide a radical escape from those experienced at home. As sociologist Daniel Briggs observes in an ethnographic study of British holiday-makers in Ibiza, the decline of work- and community-based identities means that participating in beauty, leisure, and tourism industries is 'the main practice of *being* these days' for many people, particularly working-class populations in the UK (30). This type of holiday-making is an attempt to 'construct something real from the unreal and false experience of consumer capitalism' (38). The 'lads' holiday' has connotations of homosocial bonding during a wild time away from home, in sun-drenched southern European locations such as Zante, Magaluf, and Malia. However, Briggs observes that these places 'are generally constructed [by tourists] in hindsight as crap; they are places where immature people go. Ibiza, they have heard is about style and money so should be their next destination or at least one to work towards in the future' (81). Through its wealthy and high-class image, Ibiza is reputed to be 'the holiday pinnacle' (Briggs 82), possessing a perceived exclusivity even though both Ibiza and the lesser destinations are uniformly structured around the pleasures of normative deviance expressed through excessive

consumption. In the night-time economy that Briggs describes, the only barrier to accessing spaces that describe themselves as 'exclusive' is a supply of ready cash, compared to the complex social and economic matrix that precludes social mobility at home in Britain. This arguably produces a 'dualism of the self', where over the course of the holiday 'a gradual self-deconstruction' takes place as the pleasures of holiday-making are embraced, an 'identity reversal' that 'reinforces the perceived "shitness" of "normal" life but also, at the same time, exaggerates the false happiness of the "good life"' (Briggs 189).

For Briggs, though, while these spaces of leisure are perceived as connected with freedoms only available on holiday, they are formulated through fantasies of finding fulfilment through consumption, so that the 'abroad' has as much to do with excessive consumption, as does the 'home'. Briggs is clear that in performing holiday activities such as drinking, casual sex, taking drugs, and shopping, tourists are 'playing out an extension' of regular leisure activities performed at home (3). Equally apparent for Briggs is that the perceived division between home life and holiday life is real as far as the tourists are concerned, even if these two categories are functionally indistinct. Ibiza is not just a tourist destination, but a rampantly commercialised, homogenously British-oriented tourist destination where tourists have temporary licence to behave as though they possess the wealth and social status of a celebrity, in an environment that feels exotic and different but not too threateningly foreign. Ibiza's designation as a tourist destination may reflect the logic of street magic itself, offering a transformative, temporary fantasy of escape, that ordinary life can become enchanted by partaking in an extraordinary event. Like magic, Ibiza as a concept needs to be believed in, to have some level of affective investment as 'real', to be sustained. In Briggs' analysis, holiday-making is perceived to be a recuperative activity for people to find the stability and fulfilment abroad that they may be lacking at home, and it is this narrative that underpins the attractions of the magic effects in *Magician Impossible*.

The idea of the 'lads' holiday' is implicitly present in the television text. The people who accompany Dynamo to Ibiza are introduced as his driver, security guard, and dance teacher, so all have a professional relationship with him, but are also personal friends with whom he can spend a few days of leisure. This is underscored at the top of the episode when Dynamo films himself and his posse in a car with a handheld camera, asking them, 'So where we going?' The others protest they don't know, they were just told to come and pick him up. The next shot situates the group on the island, with postcard-perfect motifs of sun, sand, and tanned women in bikinis, so

that Ibiza appears as the premise for a spontaneous group trip as well as a shooting location. The labour of filming to produce content for the show is masked as footage produced in the 'home mode', to borrow Moran's term, and thus also masks the labour of the production crew, who by contrast are not addressed, acknowledged, or incorporated into this staging.

For the lads' holiday in *Magician Impossible* is evidently a staging, participating in fantasies of Ibiza by promoting the idea that leisure should be characterised by playfulness and consumption. It thereby correlates to, and sustains, the reality of holiday making that Briggs describes. The pretext of the holiday is emphasised by the frequent use of a 'snapshot' effect- that is, still images with a sepia filter accompanied by the sound of a shutter release- from footage of a trick that has just been performed, or a memorable image that has just been captured. Ibiza is thus constituted by the pervasive media logic that it is possible to consign experiences to memory even as they are being experienced. The limitations of Urry and Larsen's concept of television tourism are evident in the imperative to represent the less seedy, more socially acceptable pleasures of Ibiza, the sunshine, beaches, music, and dancing, for the benefit of the viewers who are not sharing the holiday space and its permissive mentality of excess. Drinking and drug use is inferred just once, in a scene where Dynamo prankishly films the rest of the group asleep in the hotel one morning, eventually leaving them while he goes to make some more memories, which of course are material for the show. The pleasure of casual sex is even more obliquely referenced, for example in a flirtatious encounter with a group of swimwear models. In this sequence, Dynamo asks to borrow a room key and causes the hole of the keychain to disappear- the suggestion of access to the women's private space and the display of their bikini-clad bodies being sufficient to establish that women are also consumable pleasures on offer to lads on holiday. However, these elements of intoxication and objectification are so congruent with the culture 'at home' that they seem unremarkable, offering a palatable version of Ibiza that plays up its glamorous reputation while suppressing the darker elements of excessive consumption identified by Briggs. *Magician Impossible* thus actively intervenes in Ibiza's ideology, forming part of the hegemonic cultural narrative which promotes fun and freedom through consumption, so powerful that to Briggs' subjects it feels like reality.

Yet there is an ambiguity in the representation of Ibiza in *Magician Impossible*, as for Dynamo it is not a clearly delineated place of leisure and freedom, but rather a site where work and leisure are blurred together to create a commercial offering. The 'dedifferentiation of work and daily life' in which 'the rhythms of daily life' are transformed into 'a value-generating activity'

(Andrejevic 29) is apparent once more. Dynamo appears to move seamlessly between occupying the personas of ordinary person and celebrity, in a leisure space where these are notionally blurred. While he is initially introduced as a tourist, keen to experience what the island has to offer, his celebrity status and corresponding 'backstage' privileges are often foregrounded. For example, he joins the MC Wiley on stage at a club and later performs magic with his DJ and management in a private, backstage area. Later, he ventures into another backstage area; this time that of the superclub Pacha, to perform for a group of burlesque dancers as they get ready for the stage. These spaces, to which access is usually regulated, are as accessible to Dynamo as the public spaces normally seen in street magic. This is unlikely to mirror the experiences of his viewers, for whom the boundary between work and leisure is likely to be a deeply felt social reality even if, as Briggs argues, the activities are ideologically indistinct. This performance of labour, or the blurring of labour into leisure, therefore serves as a specific, televisual discourse of reality; the narrative generated is that Dynamo is able to bring his viewers into 'his world', offering a form of intimacy through being himself, and living out his vocation.

In these terms, *Magician Impossible* is a triumph of reality television-style dedifferentiation. Bradford and the acknowledgement of a 'moment before' fame become resources for staging Dynamo's own transformation from 'unknown working class magician', as his press kit states, to celebrity. The episode acknowledges Bradford's reputation as a marginal place in British culture, but uses the notions of transformation and enchantment to create a more positive image of the city while also naturalising the inequity of the systems that cause its deprivation. In Ibiza, which is already imagined as an enchanted place where people can transform themselves, Dynamo invokes his 'backstage' privileges with celebrities, who are represented as personal connections, while going on holiday with his old friends, who now work for him, and having all this filmed for a television show. This all contributes to a blurring of fiction and non-fiction, reality and unreality. It appears as if Dynamo's powers are so potent and innate that he cannot help but perform no matter the environment in which he finds himself. It might be hypothesised that this production of 'home' and 'abroad' is intended to arouse a desire for enchantment in the viewer; that should the everyday grind and hustle necessary for self-transformation in Bradford eventually overwhelm the subject, Ibiza, as synecdoche for the good life, can offer them temporary recuperation and escape.

This subsuming of magic effects into a narrative with an ambivalent reality status can also be read as strategic. The show responds to the inevitable anxiety over the 'magic' of

postproduction by openly acknowledging the ability of television to create a convincing staged reality, while at the same time investing in discourses of 'realness' that ensure Dynamo's magic effects are not entirely abstracted from the 'real' world. Ultimately, it is left deliberately unclear whether the fictions of the magic tricks disclose the fictional nature of the narrative, or the reality of the narrative supports the reality of the astonishing spectacles performed. This is achieved through layering elements that alternately invite the spectacles to be read as fictional or real, illuminated by a range of approaches to unpack various moments across the series.

In this chapter, this has included reading the works alongside other popular media texts. The fantasy of power and agency offered by spectacular live-action superhero films has been useful for understanding Dynamo's relationship to the urban environments in which he performs. In the 'New York' episode, he intervenes by channelling the enchanting energies of the urban environment to restore the intangible public realm at a time of crisis. At other times, analysis of specific moments has revealed the way in which *Magician Impossible* frustrates access to the real, signalling some aspects of the 'walking on water' and Shard levitation sequences as indeterminately fictional or real. Here, the show works to create a broad appeal, addressing savvy viewers by acknowledging the use of illusion without offering any further insight into 'what is "really going on"' (Andrejevic 132). The 'real' also possesses a different dimension, referring to Dynamo's life and identity prior to his emergence as a celebrity, and this is foregrounded in the use of home video throughout the series. Here, 'realness' is a resource for Dynamo to perform a dedifferentiation between work and leisure time, 'celebrity' life and family life. This dedifferentiation is also visible in the representation of 'real' places, which are presented in relation to Dynamo's subjective experience as places that are transformed and transforming.

The fictions of Dynamo's magic effects do not seek to intervene in the everyday by imagining radical and lasting transformations, but rather provoke a sense that everyday life, whether that be the recognisable and familiar public realm of urban spaces or the social realities informed by viewers' experiences and imaginations, already contains enchanting and illusory elements. Moreover, *Magician Impossible* incorporates the potential for multiple modes of engagement from the viewer, so that viewers may take up enchanted, critical, and sceptical positions in relation to the text. Though there is a similarity in the formal qualities of Blaine and Dynamo's street magic, the shift towards individuation of place and subjective experience results in a style of performance magic that more directly addresses notions of fiction and reality, inviting viewers to respond on these terms.

The range of responses that *Magician Impossible* makes available to viewers is resonant with Annette Hill's notion of a 'revolving door of belief and scepticism' (75) which characterises viewers' responses to paranormal television. For Hill, this 'revolving door' is 'marked with genre signs, fiction and fact, understanding of mediated representations, and the construction of reality for entertainment purposes', as well as 'psychological signs, disbelief and belief, understanding of deception and self-deception, and misunderstanding of paranormal ideas' (75). She notes also that audiences are not passive in their reception to this material:

To describe audiences as going through a revolving door of scepticism and belief may imply they are caught up in circumstances beyond their control. But this is not the case. People know which way round they are going through the revolving door. Audiences provide the momentum themselves. In this way, they help to produce beliefs and disbeliefs in paranormal matters. (75)

Likewise, from looking at the ways in which *Magician Impossible* makes available a range of critical approaches toward Dynamo's magic effects, it could also be said that viewers take themselves through a 'revolving door of scepticism and belief' towards the realities and fictions that are represented. This idea will be further explored in the following chapter, which examines the work of Derren Brown.

As with *Magician Impossible*, Brown's work continues the strategy of acknowledging the media apparatus and the staged reality of television, layering reality with fiction to create compelling illusions that revolve around popular understandings of human psychology. Brown's work includes immersive performances that are designed as extreme interventions in people's lives, staging seemingly high levels of jeopardy, and positioning the spectator as protagonist rather than participant. As with Blaine and Dynamo's work, Brown draws on the conventions of reality television, invoking the notions of surveillance and self-improvement as the protagonists find themselves in situations that seem genuinely risky. In these shows, the pleasures of looking become more complex, even at times placing viewers in a dilemma related to their witnessing. At the same time, Brown's work remediates past performance magic conventions, and the following chapter elaborates on the ways in which a range of his works effect a return to these practices while merging them with contemporary televisual practices.

5. Beyond magic?: knowledge, intertextuality, and participation in the work of Derren Brown

*The gloomy light of the room on screen picks out several objects. One is a box that looks like a fish tank, containing a tortoiseshell kitten. Wires extend from the base of the tank to a red button placed upon a table. On a chest of drawers, a digital clock counts down from two minutes, second by second. The room is set up with many cameras, and the operatives of the handheld devices are sometimes visible from the perspectives of the fixed rig cameras. Also in the room is Lauren, a young, blonde white woman who has been told by the illusionist Derren Brown that the button and the tank are wired up to the mains supply of the room, and that pressing the button will electrocute the kitten. If Lauren has not electrocuted the kitten by the time the digital clock finishes counting down, she will receive £500. Brown is now observing her in a surveillance room. Meanwhile, Lauren anxiously taps on the glass of the tank and talks softly to the kitten inside. Cuts between her face, the kitten trapped in its box, and the clock as it counts down. She becomes more and more distressed. We are to understand that the more she tries to tell herself not to push the button, the stronger the urge to do so becomes. I am certain that no broadcaster would agree to show the murder of an animal, but I feel terrible for her all the same. With one second left on the clock, she crosses the room and pushes the button, plunging the room into darkness as an alarm sounds. The camera holding Lauren's face in shot, as she sobs and breathes hard, switches to a blue filter to indicate night vision. Although the tension is broken, there is no relief as she is so upset. Whatever she might be thinking or feeling remains unvoiced, as Brown now swiftly enters the room followed by a handheld camera operator. The lights come back on. Brown takes her by the shoulders and asks her to close her eyes, telling her firstly that she has not killed the kitten, as it wasn't wired up to the box, and explains, 'What this was about was a trap called negative suggestion that we all fall prey to, and what it is, it's the trap whereby we focus so much on trying to avoid doing or being a certain thing that we just end up being or doing that thing because we're focusing so much on it.' He tells her, 'Every time you end up focusing negatively, your brain is going to take you back to the very powerful and quite emotional experience you've had tonight, and it will zap you into a more positive and constructive state', and hands her the £500. I can't fully believe there will be no negative psychological consequences for Lauren, and remain undecided about this as a happy outcome. (From the author's notes on *Trick or Treat*, Series 2 Episode 1)*

In Annette Hill's sociological study *Paranormal Media* (2011), one interviewee describes Derren Brown's work thus: 'I think that he moves beyond the concept of magic because he is talking about manipulation. It's completely changing the way people think, changing their behaviour, so it's not magic any more, it's completely beyond that' (137). Previous chapters have outlined some of the ways in which performance magic as a genre has been remediated by television over the past two decades. Chapter 3 proposed that David Blaine's street magic programmes established new dramaturgical and formal conventions for televised magic, while Chapter 4 argued that these conventions have been subsequently elaborated upon by Dynamo, who uses the affordances of television to 'welcome' the viewer into 'my world' so that the texts possess an autobiographical dimension as well as the spectacle of the magic effects. As Hill's interviewee suggests, though, for some viewers, the term 'magic' is not sufficient to explain Brown's feats, and the account above gives some insight as to why they may take this view. The effect described above derives its capacity to astonish not from optical illusion or sleight of hand, but the psychological manipulation of a subject in a scenario where the levels of reality at play are uncertain. The revelation that the kitten was never in danger suggests that a level of scepticism regarding the staged scenario may be justified. Referring to a specific moment typical of Brown's repertoire, wherein he predicts a word that will be selected by an audience member from a newspaper, Mangan describes the appeal of his work thus:

In a culture which is saturated by advertising, it is hard *not* to believe in the almost limitless power of the hidden persuaders to creep beneath the thresholds of our consciousness and tinker with our minds. Derren Brown's explanation- his apparent *demonstration*- of his power to do this is satisfying to us on a deep cultural level. The routine- and, most importantly, his explanation of it- offers a satisfactory explanation for otherwise amazing phenomena, because it mobilizes our expectation of being manipulated by mass media, by the advertising industry, by politicians, by [the] industrial/military complex etc. (180)

Brown's works acknowledge that his viewers frequently confront a range of subtle and inescapable forms of illusion and manipulation in many aspects of their everyday lives, not merely in the entertainment they consume.

This is mirrored by a concern with human psychology in the works. For Hill, 'Brown creates mind traps with his audience, with viewers believing "'it's not a trick", "it's just him"' (138). Landman includes Brown's work in his typology of magic as an example of psychological illusion,

a subdivision of the broader category of 'mentalism'. This type of magic is characterised by reliance on 'deception, manipulation of thoughts, and powers of suggestion to achieve the appearance of psychic manifestation' (Landman 53). Methods may include physical conjuring techniques, such as sleight of hand or using specially adapted props, but the viewer's attention rarely focuses upon these gestures and objects since they seem incidental to the effect. Instead, they are led to anticipate that methods of psychological illusionists, such as Brown, are purely psychological. These perspectives allude to a move towards depth, complexity, and ambiguity in Brown's work, offering a form of entertainment qualitatively different from that which has gone before.

However, this chapter will offer a different perspective, arguing that, alongside televisual conventions, Brown's work calls upon the conventions of performance magic as a theatrical, popular entertainment form of the past. A turn back to magic's theatrical past may be easier to accomplish for Brown than for Blaine or Dynamo, due to signifiers that mark him as belonging to a privileged class category. As Biressi and Nunn observe, 'in British culture, media and political discourse and in everyday parlance class and class categories continue to exert their hold', 'despite a general consensus in many fields that the social reality [class] once connoted has disappeared' (*Class and Contemporary British Culture* 17). In the British context, at least, the signifiers that make Brown's association with past performance magic traditions seem natural and obvious include his whiteness, 'neutral' English accent unmarked by local inflections, and costume of dark suits that echoes the evening wear emblematic of magicians, as well as confirming a 'gentlemanly' aesthetic and social status. This nexus of identities means that in the British context, Brown is more able to draw on the past as a resource for constructing his performance persona, than is a biracial, working-class performer such as Dynamo. This turn back to the past, complemented by the media affordances of the present, is visible in a number of ways that will be discussed in this chapter: in the use of reenactment, to produce a reflexive historical consciousness in the viewer, in the staging of debunking performances that mirror those conducted by Victorian-era magicians like Harry Kellar and William Fay, in the intertextuality of borrowing from other popular media genres, and in soliciting a heightened form of engagement from participants that widens the disparity between them and the viewer. It is also evident in the choice of performance venue. Where the public 'street' was a location used to suggest the physical, material reality of Dynamo and Blaine's effects, the location of Brown's work within enclosed spaces calls back to performances that take place in theatres, marked as spaces where

fiction simulates reality. From the stripped-down immediacy of the conditions that characterised street magic and sought to communicate the reality of its effects, Brown's televised texts positively revel in their hypermediacy, 'the experience that [the viewer] has in and of the presence of media' (Bolter and Grusin 70). This foregrounding of hypermediacy and turn to theatricality can be read as a strategic form of misdirection, directing viewers' attention away from any non-psychological methods and the complicity of Brown himself in facilitating an illusory media environment. Brown's work arguably does not 'go beyond' magic, so much as 'go back' to past performance practices remediated as contemporary entertainment.

5.1 Reenactment in *The Heist*

In the television special *The Heist* (2006), reenactment is a tool that produces a desire for knowledge in the viewer while defining the purpose and responsibilities of the show as entertainment. In *The Heist*, a group of apparently unsuspecting middle managers are psychologically manipulated into holding up a security guard, under conditions staged by Brown and his team. Before this finale, a reenactment of the 'Milgram experiment' is staged as a test to measure potential subjects' suggestibility, their full compliance ensuring their progression to the next stage of the selection process. Given this heightened form of involvement, the 'ordinary people' who take part in the shows will henceforth be described as 'participants' rather than 'spectators'. The reenactment takes place in a university building, and the equipment used looks outmoded, box-shaped and cumbersome, bristling with dials and switches. Despite this clearly anachronistic technology, the participants' reactions make it clear that they consider their situation to be real, and their faces are shown in extreme closeup as they consider whether or not to continue. This is especially the case with a participant named Danny, who continues with the 'experiment' until a late stage, while being vocal about his concern for the 'learner' and challenging the 'experimenter' about what kind of harm he is suffering. At one moment, agitated by the imperative to continue with the experiment but also his concern for the human being attached to the equipment, he deviates from his role as impartial 'teacher' and urges the 'learner' to answer, 'Just any response mate, come on. Wild guess'. Informed that a failure to answer should be treated as incorrect, Danny pushes the switch to deliver the shock one more time, saying 'Learner, if you're still with me mate, I'm sorry' before finally capitulating, 'I can't do this', and calling a halt to the experiment.



Figure 7. Screenshot of Danny as he considers whether to continue with the 'experiment'. All screenshots in this chapter shared with the permission of Objective Media Group.



Figure 8. Screenshot of an extreme close-up of Danny wincing at the learner's screams.

The stakes are high for Danny as he is fully invested in the experiment, the spectacle of his internal conflict reinforcing that he is experiencing what viewers know to be a staged reality as ‘actually’ real. His anguish, like Lauren’s in the *Trick or Treat* episode, is understood as a consequence of his inability to psychologically resist the demands of the experiment’s frame. Staging the Milgram experiment is thus a device that purports to reveal how the programme is constructed, demonstrating how Brown conditions his subjects to reach the desired outcome. However, its status as reenactment also reveals that *The Heist* is subject to the fundamental condition of performance magic as operating at the boundary of fiction and reality, unable to be fully fixed as one or another.

The televised, cinematic, or virtual reenactment of historical events and periods can be a historiographical tool to help people develop an affective connection to and produce knowledge about the past. Alison Landsberg argues that ‘form is crucial in the production of knowledge and meaning: new or nontraditional forms and formats make new kinds of knowledge possible’ (11). Calling on Walter Benjamin and Gilles Deleuze to frame mass media as potentially offering new forms of engagement, Landsberg argues that mass mediated forms offer a mode of encounter that can be identified as ‘distraction’, ‘that never slips fully into absorption or identification’ (16), meaning an encounter that is ‘triggered sensuously but demands cognitive processing, forcing the viewer to make sense of a particular affective bodily response’ (15). Though she acknowledges that ‘there are obvious and qualitative differences between the experience of living through an event and experiencing a mediated representation of it’, ‘nevertheless, when the individual is brought into contact with a mediated representation, the body responds.’ (19-20). In this understanding, mediated representations of historical events mobilise embodied, experiential modes as opposed to the abstract, discursive modes of much historical pedagogy. When this experiential mode is coupled with ‘other modes that assert the alien nature of the past and the viewer’s fundamental distance from it’, as seen in historical reality television such as *Frontier House* (2002) in which participants re-stage the conditions of living in another time, mass media can be a powerful pedagogic tool to produce historical knowledge (7-8). For Landsberg, media texts ought thus to be taken seriously as a way of producing forms of historical knowledge that would be inaccessible under other circumstances. In her analysis,

These powerfully affective audiovisual texts have the power to draw viewers in through the logic of absorption, making the circumstances seem personally important, but their effectiveness as catalysts to historical thinking is predicated upon the logic of

distraction, where the viewer is forced out of the absorption, alienated from the material represented, the experience of which demarcates a sense of distance from the situation or circumstances represented. (16)

Through the capacity of televised or otherwise technologically mediated texts to mobilise an experiential mode, which can perhaps be associated with the logic of immediacy that Bolter and Grusin identify as a property of remediation, and the logics of 'distraction', which may correlate to the notion of hypermediacy in their formulation, viewers can enter into a relationship with the past that provokes what Landsberg describes as 'historical thinking', resulting in the production of historical knowledge.

Understood as a media text that seeks to develop historical knowledge of the past as well as scientific knowledge in the present, *The Heist* uses a similar experiential mode. During the course of the show, viewers witness the participants such as Danny wince at the learner's screams and encourage them to answer, attempt to convince the experimenter to call a halt to the event, and grapple with their mutually opposed desires to please the experimenter and stop hurting the learner. This may produce a type of historical awareness that gives insights into why participants kept choosing to shock, a choice that seems harder to understand if more conventional pedagogic methods- such as reading a written account of the study- are used. It also seems to offer an insight into human psychology, namely a fundamental drive to obey those in authority. Indeed, such is the power of the original experiment to dramatise an ugly but fascinating aspect of human nature, that it has often been a reference point in fiction throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. It has been the subject of independent films including *I as in Icarus* (1979), *The Milgram Experiment* (2009), *Zenith* (2010) and *Experimenter* (2015), as well as forming plots and subplots in episodes of television shows including *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* (1999-2011) and *Bones* (2005- 2017). Peter Gabriel and Dar Williams are among the musicians who have written songs referencing the experiment, and it also features in Alan Moore and David Lloyd's graphic novel *V for Vendetta* (2009). Echoing Rebecca Schneider, these repetitions might be termed the 'afterlife' of the first experiment, 'a mode of remembering- a remembering that, somehow, might place history's mistakes at hand, as if through repeated enactment we could avoid... repetition' (40). In its afterlife, the Milgram study is understood, at best, to illustrate a human tendency towards uncritical conformity, and, at worst, to licence anti-social and destructive desires. Repeatedly dramatising the Milgram experiment in its afterlife suggests a kind of hope that humanity will avoid the mistakes of previous generations in succumbing too readily

to authority. *The Heist* seems to share in this intention. Landsberg draws on Turner's notion of 'demotic media', previously mentioned in this study in reference to Blaine, to suggest that historical reality television texts 'invite the audience to participate in an ethical critique. The viewer is compelled to assess the choices made by the participants' (116). *The Heist*, too, offers a pleasure that seeks to go beyond the immediacy of the moment, giving the viewer a way into evaluating what is important to them in their lives and potentially communicating the fragility of the concepts of choice and free will.

However, the participants in *The Heist* have a different type of awareness of the labour in which they are engaged, than the texts with which Landsberg is concerned. The works that Landsberg analyses, including reality history television and historical television dramas, emphasise the importance of an active historical consciousness, such that 'if one is not *conscious* that one is reenacting a historical event, then one is not thinking historically' (Landsberg 5-6). In *The Heist*, psychologically manipulating unwitting participants into behaving antisocially is part of the mechanism for producing desire for scientific knowledge of psychology that will help viewers avoid a similar fate. Therefore, producing knowledge among the viewers depends upon suppressing the participants' consciousness that they are taking part in a reenactment. This becomes clear when one of the participants, Vicky, recognises what she is doing as reenactment and vocalises this, saying, 'Can I just say, I can't do this, because I've heard of this experiment before' (*The Heist*). The point at which she recognises the activity as reenactment rather than 'real', and therefore develops the potential for 'historical thinking' in Landsberg's terms, is the point at which the enterprise of producing desire for scientific knowledge in the present collapses. She 'can't do this' not because the psychological anguish is too great, but because she possesses a higher level of awareness than other participants, perhaps believing that playing along would compromise the study. In the street magic shows discussed earlier in this thesis, there is a relation of disparity between the spectators who participate in the performance, whose reactions help identify the effects as having real spatial and temporal dimensions and provide a source of viewing pleasure, and the viewers for whom the encounter is recorded, edited, and broadcast. The use of reenactment intensifies the disparity between participants and viewers, as the participants are denied the historical awareness that the programme aims to cultivate among viewers. In this way, the programme shows its commitment to a mode of 'realness' that depends upon participants being unaware that they are part of a staged reality rather than the fully self-conscious and reflexive subjects described in Landsberg's work on mediated reenactment.

The performance magic principle of 'dual reality' is thus evident in the Milgram effect both in its original form, and in Brown's reenactment. A dual reality effect is one in which the participant believes that one sequence of events took place, while the audience believe they are witnessing another. Dual reality is easier to describe than it is to define, as it is located in the nuances of verbal and physical communication, but essentially involves developing two narratives about the events taking place, one for the participants in the effect, and one for the rest of the audience. Luke Jermy's routine *Touching on Hoy*, performed for the International Magic Convention, exemplifies the logic of dual reality (*The Luke Jermy Lecture*). In this carefully structured and scripted mentalism effect, the actual words and movements are crucial to understanding the success of the trick. Therefore, a transcript of the relevant parts of the recording, including movement and non-verbal communication as well as a brief synopsis of the method, is reproduced in an appendix to this thesis. The dual reality of *Touching on Hoy* is created by the interplay between language and gesture. Jermy's instructions appear unambiguous, so the effect is easy for spectators to follow, but this clarity is belied by his secret gestures, which communicate a different reality to the participants. In the original Milgram experiment and in Brown's reenactment, the reality for the participants is that the experiment is about memory and punishment, and that the learner is the subject of the experiment. It is crucial for the experiment's success that the participants, who are the true subjects, believe that the learner and experimenter also share their understanding of reality. The staging of this dual reality is therefore acknowledged to the viewer, but not the participant, heightening the discrepancy in perspective between participants and viewers, to a situation where the participants are entirely unaware of the degree to which their experience is staged.

As part of its commitment to producing desire for scientific knowledge in the present, this reenactment of the Milgram study (perhaps inadvertently) also produces a fantasy of such knowledge as a stable referent. In the course of the many repetitions that constitute the 'afterlife' of the experiment, the study's methodology and its findings have been reiterated such that they take on a particular presence in culture as fixed, incontrovertible, oddly timeless points of knowledge, failing to engage with later critiques. Jerry M. Burger has offered such critiques, arguing that the results Milgram obtained may tell us less about a general human tendency to blindly obey authority figures, and more about the specific environmental factors that pressured subjects to continue delivering shocks (489). These are '(a) the incremental nature of the task; (b) the novelty of the situation and the kind of normative information made available; (c) the

opportunity to deny or diffuse responsibility; and (d) the limited opportunity to ponder decisions' (Burger 491). Yet these environmental factors are all simulated in the re-enactment of *The Heist*, notwithstanding Burger's observations. This raises questions as to whether the ostensible commitment to knowledge claimed for *The Heist* might be less important to the show than fidelity to the dramaturgy of the experiment, and the compelling story it seems to tell about human nature. Viewers are informed through an authoritative, expository voice-over- the 'voice of God' (Corner 30)- that the experiment investigates 'how normal people can commit atrocious acts simply because they are following orders'. This introduction contains no reference to later scientific scholarship, such as Burger's, that questions the findings of the study, perhaps because this might dilute the shock of its message. This reenactment therefore perpetuates the mythology that has congealed around Milgram's original study, and problematises the commitment to producing knowledge that seems to be the justification for its inclusion.

The fault lines of this commitment to knowledge and truth over fiction begin to appear early in the episode when Brown claims his techniques do not involve hypnosis, which is 'a form of play-acting'. In this instance, hypnosis is constructed as a theatrical encounter where participants are aware that they are being controlled and so willingly submit to the demands of the hypnotiser, and therefore does not offer an experience that can be regarded as 'real'. As Schneider observes regarding living history practices of reenactment, 'theatre, almost invariably being associated with debased sentiment and, therefore, fantasy, appears to negate any claim to authenticity' (47). John Corner also captures this sense in his discussion of 'dramatisation' as a contested element of factual television that 'has been controversially prominent in the shift towards merging "actuality" with "entertainment", as it indicates '*enactment*- the production of an event precisely for the purpose of spectatorship' (32). The dramatic and theatrical lie uneasy in a context that privileges 'actuality' and reality, such as *The Heist*. The aim of the programme is to 'persuade someone to do something they would not normally be prepared to do' by 'insidiously [massaging] certain ideas and mental states into these people without ever mentioning a robbery so that hopefully when the time comes they will just spontaneously, of their own free will, just decide to do it' (*The Heist*). The reenactment of *The Heist* is therefore not to be understood as the false 'play-acting' of hypnotism. Brown's insistence on the fundamentally anti-theatrical nature of his enterprise thus attempts to draw the boundary between real and fictional aspects of *The Heist*. And yet, despite Brown's protests, it is still fundamentally reenactment, a type of 'shifty and mobile' (Schneider 87) performance that causes a slippage in time to do something that is

simultaneously real and unreal, destabilising the programme's carefully inscribed boundaries between 'play-acting' and 'not play-acting'.

The instability of reenactment, as a method of disavowing the fictionality of the text and provoking desire for scientific knowledge, is apparent when this very instability is also called upon to define the limits of Brown and his team's ethical responsibilities to their participants, in an attempt to secure the reality status of *The Heist*. Brown's website makes the following statement with regard to the psychological and sociological experiments referenced in his works:

One of the delights of making my shows for me is that I can construct, reconstruct or reinvent psychological experiments in a way that would be most likely impossible within a clinical setting. The legal and ethical guidelines for making a television programme are strict and rigorously enforced, but they are not the same as those insisted on by the ethics committees of the clinical world. If one were looking for funding to carry out a psychological experiment, it might be very difficult to secure that if it were likely, for example, to attract controversy, or if the subjects would need to be deceived. A television show, on the other hand, might revel in both those factors. Obviously the on-screen result is unlikely to be treated as serious science, but if intelligently enough thought-through, might be a good springboard for discussion. ('Psychological and Sociological Experiments')

In this view, television is justified in prioritising narrative and spectacle as long as it meets ethical standards, which need not be the same as clinical ones. However, within *The Heist*, no distinction is drawn between the 'results' Brown achieves in the programme and the results of the original study performed in a clinical setting. In other words, Brown does not explicitly admit to the possibility of lowering methodological standards to allow a more dramatically interesting result. Thus, a problem is solved: television can allow access to interesting but ethically dubious experiments to viewers beyond the scientific community, reenacting them for entertainment purposes as cultural texts that are available for 'discussion'. In its reenactment, *The Heist* is simultaneously a legitimate endeavour to produce real results and real knowledge in the viewer, and a piece of commercial entertainment that is not 'real' enough to require the stringent ethical guidelines of a psychological experiment.

The necessity of this distinction between 'serious science' and the reenactments of *The Heist* is evident from the British communications watchdog Ofcom's responses to seventeen viewer complaints that *The Heist* 'was harmful to the participants, especially in the use of the

Milgram experiment; trivialised armed robbery and either glamorised it or made it seem relatively simple to do; [and] condoned shoplifting' ('Ofcom Broadcast Bulletin Issue Number 55' 6). Ofcom ruled that the programme had not breached its regulations, finding that it was sufficiently clear that participants had consented to the process retroactively and no long-term negative effects were apparent; that the broadcaster had been 'responsible in terms of the protective measures it had put in place', monitoring participants and the presence of psychiatrists; that the scene in which the heist took place was clearly artificial; and that there was a 'significant shock factor' when participants took the bait and carried out the heist ('Ofcom Broadcast Bulletin Issue Number 55' 6-8). It seems that Ofcom arrived at its conclusions based on a recognition that *The Heist* was neither fully fictional nor fully real- that consent was really obtained, protective measures had really been put in place, while the heist scene itself was both unexpectedly shocking and clearly fictional. The complaint made to Ofcom that the programme was 'harmful to the participants' seems to be based upon a perception that participants were unaware of the dual reality nature of the show. To counter this, Ofcom takes note of the programme's assurances that it was made clear to the participants 'exactly what they had been involved in' ('Ofcom Broadcast Bulletin Issue Number 55' 6), so that the moment of revelation did take place within the frame of the show, albeit deferred to the end. *The Heist* thus follows the dramaturgy of the Milgram study without needing to fulfil the stringent ethical and clinical standards of a 'real' experiment, thereby partially disclosing its fictionality.

Though *The Heist* voices its commitment to reality, truth and knowledge, the fiction and unreality summoned by its use of reenactment cannot be banished. It is a text that operates at the boundaries of fiction and reality. This chapter has already mentioned the dual reality at play in both *The Heist* and the original Milgram study, as a way of conceptualising the knowledge gaps between audiences. It can be argued that another dual reality is at play in Brown's works, centred around the understanding that the results Brown gleans from his subjects are due solely to the application of psychological pressure, rather than more banal, physical or logistical methods. This understanding is the basis for misdirection and helps Brown's methods to remain undetected. Brown claims that his incredible and perplexing feats are not achieved through genuine psychic abilities, but the application of little-known scientific and psychological principles. By discounting a paranormal explanation, a desire to know exactly how his effects work is produced. Reenactment can thus be considered as one of many strategies deployed throughout Brown's works to help audiences to construct 'partial explanations' of how his feats are achieved,

identified by Annette Hill one of the ways in which Brown goes 'beyond magic' (172). The formulation of 'explanation' suggests a generous and collaborative model where viewers are invited to discover 'what is "really going on"' (Andrejevic 132). However, Hill points out that the 'partial explanations' in Brown's work depend upon viewers' 'understandings and misunderstandings about psychology and magic', and so viewers construct them using 'what they *think* they know' (172, emphasis mine). Exploiting 'what they think they know', the shadowy and uncertain territory between knowledge and belief, reality and fiction, is a key feature of Brown's work, primarily '[highlighting] the myth of psychology as all-powerful' rather than revealing secrets (Hill 172). The success of Brown's strategy of 'partial explanations' can perhaps be attributed to the pervasive fantasy described by Mangan that the institutions, structures, and narratives that shape our lives are largely manipulative and deceptive (180), and the perception of the power of the human mind to create its own reality. The following section discusses a case study that specifically reaches back to past practices of performance magic to play upon this sense of illusion as an aspect of everyday life, further collapsing viewers' senses of the real and fictional.

5.2 Debunking performances in *Séance*

Brown's work shows a commitment to 'debunking' the claims made by individuals and groups to substantiate esoteric and paranormal abilities such as clairvoyance, mediumship, and faith healing. Brown positions himself as a sceptic, on the side of rationality and truth- that is, on the audience's side, vigilant against the predation of professional deceivers. In *Séance*, a live broadcast television special, Brown selected twelve applicants, all students, to undertake a séance in an abandoned university building in London. He supplies them with a supernatural story about a group of students who died in a suicide pact in the building during the 1970s, informing them that inexplicable paranormal activity has subsequently been observed at the site. Throughout the programme, the participants reenact spiritualist practices that were popular in the Victorian era, communicating with one of the deceased, named 'Jane', through a Ouija board, and even through the body of one of the participants who acts as a medium. As with *The Heist*, *Séance* is concerned with reenactment as a way of producing desire for knowledge in the present, this time regarding the ways in which evidence of supernatural abilities can be convincingly faked, also making visible Brown's affinity with the theatrical past of performance magic.

Magicians have historically been active in 'rationalist' campaigns against those who lay

claim to supernatural abilities. The development of spiritualism and esoteric belief during the 1860s and 1870s was an especially fertile period for a mutually dependent, if outwardly antagonistic relationship between stage magicians and psychics. This history has been extensively chronicled elsewhere (Kasson 2001; Steinmeyer 2003; Natale 2016). Magicians with a pro-‘rationalist’ agenda often turned to performance, showing that manifestations of such abilities could be faked by using conjuring methods to produce the same, convincing effects as the so-called charlatans. In Steinmeyer’s account of performance magic’s Victorian and early twentieth century Golden Age, the brothers William and Ira Davenport claimed that their ‘Spirit Cabinet’ act enlisted the help of supernatural entities to throw flour and play instruments, while their hands and feet were securely bound. Several magicians copied their act and claimed to show the mundane truths behind the supposedly paranormal feats, some of whom had worked with the brothers, like Harry Kellar and William Fay (Steinmeyer 65). More recently, James Randi’s debunking efforts have notoriously targeted self-proclaimed psychic Uri Gellar, reproducing Gellar’s metal-bending abilities on American television using conjuring techniques to demonstrate this particular feat does not require paranormal powers (*Exposed: Magicians, Psychics, and Frauds*). Brown, too, uses performances to debunk both Victorian-era spiritualist practices and more contemporary paranormal phenomena.

Such restagings are often framed in Brown’s work as experiments before the audience, decontextualising them from their initial performance circumstances or creating a fictional history for them. The use of a mind-reading automaton in the theatrical performance *Svengali* (2012) refers indirectly to the mechanical puppet Psycho conceived by Golden Era magicians John Nevil Maskelyne, author of *Our Magic*, and John Algernon Clarke. However, Brown does not acknowledge this debt to the past, so that an audience without prior knowledge of this particular episode in performance magic’s history would experience it only as referring to the present moment. In 2009, Brown also performed a routine he named the ‘Oracle’ act and presented it as a resurrection of a Golden Era routine, that is in fact a variation of a contemporary staple mentalist act known broadly as ‘Q&A’ (*An Evening of Wonders*). Here, a fictional history is employed as a narrative device that invites the audience to view the performance as a type of historical artefact being demonstrated before them, so causing the past to rupture into the present. Through the frame of experiment and demonstration, a slippage in time takes place where Brown becomes an intermediary between past and present, creating an ambiguity regarding the reality status of the spectacle. Brown opens *Séance* with a short piece to camera which includes the lines, ‘I don’t

believe in spiritualism, personally I find it quite ugly. But I am interested in the sorts of techniques used by fraudulent Victorian mediums and I'm interested to see whether these techniques can be used to affect a modern, sceptical audience'. This opens up the potential for a range of engagements, including scepticism. However, it also uses the visceral, sensational mode of spectacle that Tom Gunning characterises as the aesthetic of attraction ('An Aesthetic of Astonishment' 84). In *Séance*, the dead make their presence felt in more ways than one, in the restaging of past performance practices, and in soliciting an affective response from viewers and participants that unsettles the apparent reality status of the performance as 'only' demonstration or experiment.

Although Brown confirms that no supernatural activity is taking place, the show's construction nevertheless creates uncertainty about this. This happens especially when participants seem to know things about 'Jane' that seem too specific to be guesses, for example an automatic writing exercise that reveals the city where she lived, and moments when their screams, shudders, and jumps seem to express real fear. In one particularly charged moment, Brown and the group 'discover' that the room in which one of their number has been isolated, although connected through radio and CCTV, used to be 'Jane's' room. Brown expresses concern for the isolated individual, Sally, and tries to resume radio contact with her. This measure understandably raises the participants' levels of fear and anxiety. They beg Brown, 'Don't tell her', asking him to avoid scaring her by disclosing that the room she is occupying was 'Jane's' room. A sequence of events follows that draws attention to the mediating apparatus of the radio and television monitor; initially, Sally does not seem to hear Brown's voice over the radio, causing the participants further dismay, then a sharp screech from the equipment makes the participants (perhaps the viewer included) jump and scream in shock, before audio contact is resumed. Brown informs Sally that someone is coming to fetch her from the room, but does not tell her why. She seems relieved and agrees, then screams without warning, seemingly recoiling from something, and clasps her hands over her ears. She pleads with Brown, 'Will you just come quick?' and 'Don't let anything happen to me'. The sequence invites a direct empathic connection between the viewer and participants in a shared affective moment of shock and concern, while the layers of mediation draw attention to the constructed nature of the scenario, reminding the viewer it does not represent an unmediated reality.

To add to this uncertainty, viewers are also invited to participate at home with the spiritualist 'experiments', choosing a spirit to contact from a selection of photographs and

creating their own Ouija boards, and phone in to report any strange occurrences. Messages from viewers played after ad breaks report visions of deceased loved ones, feeling touches by invisible hands, witnessing objects moving on their own in their homes, and receiving the same results of the 'experiments' as do the participants. These suggest that at least some viewers are identifying with the participants in the show. In soliciting their participation and identification in this way, the show goes beyond enjoying the spectacle of the fear of others and the paranormal reenactment. Viewers are encouraged to feel that they, too, are a part of *Séance*.

How does the purpose claimed for *Séance*, of debunking paranormal phenomena, align with this mode of engagement, which seems to suggest that such phenomena could be real? The apparent misalignment between magicians' investment in illusion and their commitment to debunking provoked a Guardian writer to remark,

there's something paradoxical about stage magic as a vehicle for campaigning rationalism. Because the currency of this art form isn't reason, it's wonder... If they succeeded in curing us all of credulousness, after all, none of them would ever work again. (Logan)

The tactic of using performance as a method of debunking pulls viewers into the uncertain territory of the 'magic assemblage', During's notion of 'the medley of entertainments routinely associated with magic in the space or the business of production', associated 'less by virtue of any formal or abstract features that they have in common than by their contiguity to one another in day-to-day commercial show business' (69; 66). The 'magic assemblage' can include attractions that are 'fictive and non-fictive, mimetic and non-mimetic, active or passive, visceral or intellectual', ranging from rollercoasters to mind-reading, ghost-raising to scientific demonstrations, but always gathered around a 'core' of conjuring practices (During 66-7). According to During, all these entertainments are part of the same commercial matrix, in close spatial and conceptual proximity to each other. For Simone Natale, too, nineteenth-century spiritualism's prominence should be understood in terms of its inclusion 'in a growing market for leisure activities and spectacular attractions', in which the theatrical character of séances and sittings and the business practices of spiritualists were indistinct from other types of spectacle (2): 'that séances were presented as authentic manifestations of spirit agency, therefore, does not distinguish them from spectacular attractions', but rather shows 'they were inserted within a broader array of shows and exhibits that played with the blurring distinctions between authenticity and forgery' (10). Although the epistemic frameworks used by magicians and

spiritualists differed, 'through an unending interplay of exposures and counter-exposures, stage magicians and spiritualists created not two contrasting discourses but rather a fundamentally coherent one that mutually reinforced their public visibility' (Natale 79). From this perspective, it makes sense that the reenactment of paranormal phenomena performed by Kellar and Fay did not suffocate the Davenports' 'Spirit Cabinet' or the assemblage of spiritualist performances associated with it. Rather, these reenactments gave the 'Spirit Cabinet' the oxygen it needed to become a part of magicians' repertoire at the time. These debunking performances could be understood as part of the same spectacular entertainment culture as psychics and mediums, rather than forming an opposing one, thereby resolving the 'paradox' that Logan describes.

Although During and Natale are concerned with the mutual visibility and creative influence of nineteenth-century paranormal spectacles and the 'magic assemblage', it is a useful model to apply to Brown's works in the present. While *Séance* promises to debunk spiritualist practices by reenacting them, thereby producing knowledge of how supernatural events can be falsified, the programme seems ultimately to offer a different form of mystery and wonder by affirming Brown's capacity to manipulate people's experiences of reality. At the end of *Séance*, Brown finally reminds the assembled group- and the watching viewers- that no paranormal events have really been taking place. Instead, he informs them that he has been giving the group subtle cues about what to expect from their experience and how to respond to it, which have influenced their reactions and interpretations. The final image of the episode is of the actor who plays 'Jane' being escorted by Brown inside the building to meet the group, so they can verify for themselves that the story is fictional. It ends with the following coda appearing as text on screen: '[b]oth Derren and the production team ensured that all of the participants were well cared for and comfortable when filming was over. They left exhilarated and pleased to have taken part, fully understanding the nature of the experiment'. What seems to be truly astonishing about the programme is that Brown was able to generate this range of affective states among the group of participants, despite repeated assertions that whatever paranormal events they experienced were not real. However, this does not account for viewers' own reports of paranormal events witnessed during the show. Were these reports also staged? If not, can they too be explained through Brown's influence? If not, what is the alternative? In leaving such questions open, *Séance* could be considered to enrich the magic assemblage, giving audiences a way into the revolving door of belief and scepticism (Hill 75). Debunking performances show, rather than tell, creating works 'where belief and entertainment are not alternatives, but may coexist in a cultural form

that stimulates curiosity and wonder in believers and nonbelievers alike' (Natale 171).

Moreover, debunking performances demonstrate that paranormal abilities and events *can* be faked, not that they all *are* faked. This allows Brown himself to adopt an open-minded stance with regard to paranormal phenomena. In a 2010 documentary in which he shadows the medium Joe Power, he states that 'the claims that [Power] makes are quite big, quite serious. [I] would love it to be true, would love to be blown away by what he does, and I'm really hoping that I'll see and hear stuff that I can't explain' (*Derren Brown Investigates*). Here, Brown emphasises his own position as open-minded and even keen to see evidence of supernatural abilities. He does not comment on the existence of paranormal phenomena in general, but on the specific claims of individuals and exploitative industrial practices. In *Séance*, people are invited to witness spiritualist practices for themselves, framed as reenactments independent of their original Victorian performance context, and offered knowledge about how such events can be convincingly faked to form their own future judgements. Brown also does not have to acknowledge his complicity in this world of illusion, as he is framing these performances as opportunities for knowledge production. In other words, he and other magicians who perform debunking appear to offer audiences the knowledge to navigate the matrix of fiction and reality while enhancing the magic assemblage further, condemning individual practices or practitioners without ruling out the possibility that *all* such practices are fraudulent.

The notions of participation introduced here need to be explored more closely in order to more fully understand the implications of using 'ordinary people' in Brown's work. The texts to be discussed in the remainder of this chapter consist of intricately plotted fictional scenarios staged for a single, unsuspecting participant. To acknowledge this, the language of the rest of this chapter shifts once more from discussing 'participants' to 'protagonists', as these audience members are unknowingly recruited to take the leads in stories that are scripted for them. Ironically, considering the degree to which they are managed and monitored, these programmes play a pedagogic role of teaching protagonists and viewers about the importance of empowerment and taking control over one's life. They seem thus to carry the logic of reaction-seeking street magic to an extreme, their interventions seeking a permanent transformation rather than a moment of shock or astonishment. The following section discusses the intertextual strategies used to contextualise and shape these scenarios, so that Brown's work can be situated within a broader frame of media references as well as signalling a commitment to the staged fictions of performance magic.

5.3 Remediation and intertextuality: stories from the *Apocalypse*

In Brown's work, concepts, themes, and imagery from a range of fictional texts mediate both the viewers' and protagonist's experiences. For example, *Derren Brown Presents Twisted Tales* (2016) seems to draw upon conventions in *Tales of the Unexpected* (1979- 1988), an anthology series based on a collection of short stories by Roald Dahl. In *Tales of the Unexpected*, Dahl appears as a narrator, referencing the oral traditions of folklore while also affirming his authorial presence, and Brown likewise is shown introducing 'tales' in which an unsuspecting member of the public finds themselves in the midst of a scenario staged just for them: their very own supernatural story. Although fear is described in *Twisted Tales* as a fundamental and universal human emotion, the specificity of that fear is mediated in the programme through tropes from a range of media. In scenarios based on the narratives of ghost stories, horror movies, and urban legends, one woman is made to believe she has seen a ghost while house-sitting, another that her mother-in-law's new partner is a cannibal serial killer, and finally a couple are convinced that an end-of-the-pier fortune teller really does have the power to predict the future. In *Twisted Tales*, the fictitious frame is only made apparent to the viewer and confederates, while the participants themselves apparently perceive the events as 'real'. Similar intertextual, intermedial impulses are evident in Brown's recent collaboration with Merlin Entertainments to design an attraction named *Derren Brown's Ghost Train: Rise of the Demon* at the group's Thorpe Park theme park in Surrey, south-west of London. The *Ghost Train* opened in July 2016, and according to Thorpe Park's website is 'the world's only fully immersive psychological attraction designed to manipulate the human mind' ('*Derren Brown's Ghost Train: Rise of the Demon*'). The underlying concept of the attraction echoes funfair experiences of the past, but uses Vive VR headsets to give the ride its immersive dimensions, as riders are guided into the near-future world of a London besieged by terrifying mutants. As well as the audio-visual immersion, the *Ghost Train* appeals to other sensory capacities; reviewers report that the ride's staff present in the carriage brush the legs of passengers as characters lurch towards them, while one commenter reports that the carriage, modelled to resemble a London Underground train, 'smells like the real thing' (gHOSTTRAINRIDER). Ultimately, these interventions are revealed to be playful and momentary. Ordinary life resumes afterwards, its normality all the more marked for having been interrupted by these brief interventions. *Apocalypse*, however, seeks a more lasting transformation in its

protagonist.

Apocalypse appeared as a two-part series in which, the protagonist, Stephen, is led to believe that a Perseid meteor has struck the Earth and released a highly contagious virus that causes sufferers to attack the uninfected. Having been separated from his family, Stephen awakes in a hospital from a trance induced by Brown and encounters various other 'survivors' in his journey towards finding them. The ostensible purpose of *Apocalypse* is to transform Steven from an economically inactive, emotionally immature slacker who is unprepared to take responsibility for his life, to being, in the show's own terms, 'the best that he can be'. This is achieved, in Brown's words, by 'taking away' everything in his life that he has come to take for granted through a kind of trial by ordeal: the staging of a zombie apocalypse. This scenario claims to present Steven with opportunities to grow as a person by removing any resources he may have had, including separating him from his loved ones, and engineering situations in which he must take responsibility for difficult decisions and support those more vulnerable than himself. *Apocalypse* is presented as a real intervention in the protagonist's life that nevertheless causes the distinction between reality and fiction to appear porous, taking place in a series of spaces that are entirely subject to the control of Brown and his team. That these are enclosed spaces that stage a fiction of the real, performing a simulation of reality such that the protagonist cannot tell the real and fictional aspects of the experience apart, indicates a further affinity with the performance conditions of magic's theatrical past. At the same time, the viewing audience are repeatedly made aware of the show's staging, drawing upon the reflexivity often seen in popular reality television. Steven's experience contains a message for them about the dangers of overreliance on media, and the need to cultivate qualities that help us 'be the best that we can be'.

As with the tropes of the ghost story, urban legend, and horror movie in *Twisted Tales* and the *Ghost Train*, other fictional traditions are remediated in Stephen's journey of transformation: in this case, the zombie film. Zombies are particularly fluid in terms of their signifiers and the range of media in which they appear. For Nick Muntean and Matthew Thomas Payne, 'the zombie's basic fictional composition is determined by extant social horrors during its time of production'; lacking pathos or the possibility of redemption, they are empty signifiers 'upon which audiences can project their fears and anxieties' (240). It is perhaps this 'culturally productive and expressive vacuity' (Muntean and Payne 242) that affords the zombie its transmedial capacity to inhabit television and other media genres as it has done film. At the same time, particular conventions of representation have emerged that enable viewers to recognise

the influence of zombie texts even when, as with *Apocalypse*, the term 'zombie' is never used in the diegetic world of the narrative. The zombies in *Apocalypse* appear to be drawn from the twenty-first century trope of 'fast zombies', as opposed to the shuffling, shambling undead of George A. Romero's *Dead* trilogy. 'Fast zombies' can be seen in Zack Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead* reboot (2004), the UK television series *Dead Set* (2008), and video games such as *Doom 3* (2004) and *Painkiller* (2004) (Cameron 72-3). Fast or slow, zombies lurch around the contemporary mediascape, continually reanimated by these texts in which zombification appears as an infectious disease that leads to pandemic. Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002) is perhaps the most recognisable textual influence on *Apocalypse* in terms of plot and aesthetics. In both, the infected lack the cannibalistic impulses of prior zombie texts, instead displaying uncontrollable aggression towards the uninfected. They also share a use of the visual shock, with the 'rapid, MTV-style editing' (Carroll n.p.) that characterised *28 Days Later* also in use in *Apocalypse*. In part of the title sequence of *Apocalypse*, choppy images of viruses as seen under electron microscopes and a close-up of a sign apparently on a laboratory door stating 'INFECTION RISK- BIOHAZARD' give way to dark, blurry shots of people running, followed by bodies lurching dreadfully across the screen, and a splatter of blood on a window or perhaps a car windscreen. The rapid succession of images judder, flicker, and are otherwise interrupted, creating an aesthetic that is highly disorienting.

Not only are the visual and formal conventions of cinematic zombie texts taken up in *Apocalypse*, but the 'culturally productive and expressive vacuity' (Muntean and Payne 242) of zombies themselves means that televisual zombie texts are similarly able to reflect and interrogate the anxieties perpetuated by wider media culture. In *Apocalypse*, zombies are used to signify the social 'diseases' of apathy and disengagement. This is evident from the pathologisation of Steven through the mise-en-scene of the episode. On first contact with the world of *Apocalypse* in Part One, he awakes in an abandoned medical facility wearing hospital pyjamas, with no idea that the crisis has occurred, mirroring the viewer's introduction to Boyle's protagonist played by Cillian Murphy. Later in Part One, he has swapped his outfit of 'patient' for that of 'soldier', attired in the same military camouflage as fellow survivor Ian, whose later departure from the group prompts Steven to take on the role of leader.

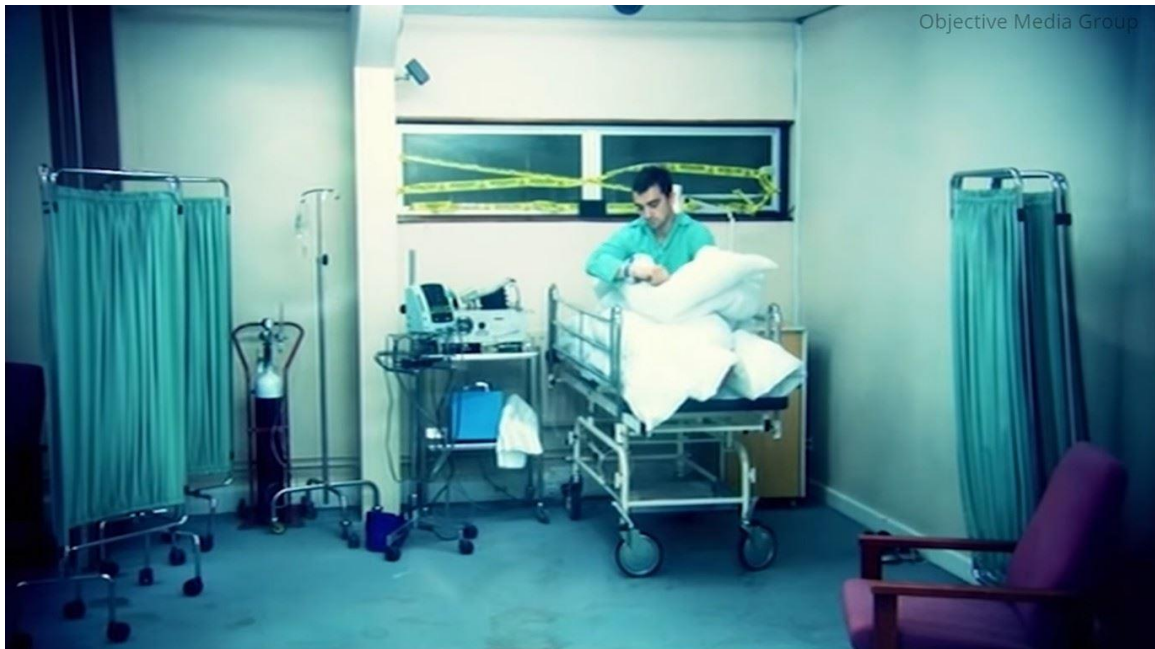


Figure 9. Screenshot from Part One of Apocalypse. Steven as he awakes in in a medical facility, wearing hospital pyjamas.



Figure 10. Screenshot from Part One of Apocalypse. Steven at the military base with other 'survivors', wearing camouflage.

If the premise of Steven's unwitting participation is to be taken seriously, then from his perspective these clothes are merely a reflection of the various extraordinary environments he finds himself in; for the viewer, they are costume choices that underscore Steven's journey from 'sick' person in need of intervention, to a leader who wields a specific form of sanctioned authority. It is made clear from the beginning of the show that the broader population is also characterised as at risk. Surveying Steven's messy, dirty bedroom, full of half-empty cans of lager and books on 'how to be a mind magician', Brown reflects that, 'Steven is in my mind symptomatic of a general malaise where people feel a sense of, I guess, entitlement' (*Apocalypse: Part One*). Evidently, as far as *Apocalypse* is concerned, viewers cannot be too complacent or judgemental towards Steven in case they fail to recognise their own symptoms of the 'general malaise'.

Through the figure of the zombie, the notion that contemporary media culture may play a role in the spread of this 'malaise' is raised throughout the programme. Arguably, post-9/11 zombies are emblematic of 'the worst-case fears of an apprehensive media culture, entertaining the same anxieties about world events, in this case, a fear of terrorism and epidemic in the zombie form' (Birch-Bayley 1137). Zombie films in particular tend to feature 'hyper-mediatized introductory credit sequences' that 'foreground the ascendant ubiquity of the "information society"', implicating this 'information society' in the carnage and destruction to follow (Muntean and Payne 248). In the first scene of *28 Days Later*, a group of animal rights activists liberate monkeys infected with the 'rage virus' that spreads to zombify the majority of the population. As part of the scientists' brutalising treatment of the animals, they are 'being subjected to televisual images of death and destruction', and Muntean and Payne read this as 'emblematic... of the hypodermic needle (a.k.a. "magic bullet") theory of media violence', which 'posits a direct causal link between the viewing of mediated violence and committing real-world violence' (249). It seems unlikely that the film is indeed advocating this reductive understanding of media's effect on consciousness, since if this were the case then Boyle would be implicating himself in such a culture of violence. More cautiously, the scene can be read as dramatising anxieties about violence being contagious, and media being a vector of its transmission. A connection between zombie bodies and media is also foregrounded by Allan Cameron, who claims that the particular materiality of zombie films- pixellation, visual and aural judders that suggest issues with the broadcast, static, and unclear picture- draw attention to the events unfolding on screen as mediated, suggesting that mediating technology cannot adequately represent the assault of zombification (67). As this process of breakdown and disorder depicted in zombie films extends

to the media itself, 'the temporality of the zombie is thus the temporality of the mediated present' (Cameron 80). This raises the intriguing idea echoed in *Apocalypse* that the disintegrating zombie body, which is the cause of contagion, can be equated to the medium that represents and transmits it, so that familiar media systems are pathologised as carriers of social disease. In perpetuating a fiction of the real for an unsuspecting member of the audience, *Apocalypse* shows an ambivalence regarding the integrity of its own mediating apparatus.

Indeed, the media systems and devices on which Steven relies are shown to be both a source of zombification, and contingent and fragile enough that they too can be zombified. In Part One of *Apocalypse*, two DJs on Steven's preferred radio station are recruited to discuss the impending meteor strike, and his phone and laptop are hacked so that fake articles relating to the predicted collision appear on frequently visited news websites and apps. To enhance the threat's credibility further, a specially recorded segment of the magazine programme *Sunday Brunch* is fed to the television in Steven's family home, featuring an interview with an astronomer who discusses the potential implications of the meteor strike. When he awakes in a bed in an abandoned hospital, he is apprised of what has happened through a fake emergency broadcast system shown on a still-working television. The static and brief interruptions in transmission that recall the materiality of zombie films occur not only during the scenes filmed via hidden camera, but also to Brown's addresses to camera; as he narrates Stephen's experiences at the top of the programme and after advertising breaks, his face also flickers with static. This visual link between the staged reality of *Apocalypse* and the segments that viewers are supposed to take seriously as real, points to the corruptibility of all media. It illustrates the authority that media systems possess to influence what consumers believe about the world, and displays the contagiousness of misinformation, the ease with which fiction can work its way into an audience's consciousness. The prevalence of the term 'post-truth', named the *Oxford Dictionary's* word of the year in 2016, in contemporary political and journalistic discourse highlights a current anxiety about these issues.¹⁶ To return to Mangan's analysis of Brown's mind-reading performance, not only does *Apocalypse* '[mobilize] our expectation of being manipulated by mass media, by the advertising industry, by politicians, by [the] industrial/military complex etc.' (180), it dramatises this by

¹⁶ The *OD* defines 'post-truth' as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief', citing its frequency 'in the context of the EU referendum in the United Kingdom and the presidential election in the United States' that saw it extended from 'from an isolated quality of particular assertions to a general characteristic of our age' ('Word of the Year 2016 is...').

deploying the same strategies used to spread false information, like a destructive virus, for the purposes of the show.

Still, if the 'general malaise' Brown identifies is an illness that can be transmitted through media systems, does this mean that a 'cure' can be similarly broadcast, and does *Apocalypse* itself have the potential to become such a therapeutic intervention? At the end of Part Two of the programme, Steven reports in an interview with Brown one month after the event- or '28 days later'- that:

It's made me feel a lot more confident, I feel like now I'm more engaged with life, I feel I can actually take more chances now without the fear of failing. I look back at myself, and the way I was, I realised I was just wasting the days and lazing around in front of the TV and just not doing anything with my life... I don't think we've ever been closer as a family, to be honest. I just couldn't believe the efforts they would go to just to try and help me out.

In fact, the still-present risks to the viewer are made clear at the end of the programme. Just when all has been resolved and Steven remarks on how happy he is to feel safe again, the camera pans to the right revealing a hideous zombie lunging towards the viewer. Despite Steven's apparent transformation and the revelation of the staged reality, a threat is clearly still present for the majority of those watching. Steven may have dealt with his demons, but the fact that he has been discussed in the show as emblematic of a wider social illness of entitlement and apathy, coupled with the re-emergence of the zombie as a threat, suggests that the disengaged, complacent viewer may yet fall victim to social zombification.

While *Apocalypse* highlights the contingency of media structures and the corruptibility of their content, it does not offer any reassurance or direct viewers towards a solution, instead presenting the viewer with a dilemma. Why, having been repeatedly informed of the dangers of relying too much on media objects that insist they tell the truth but only produce illusion, should viewers place any trust in the aspects of *Apocalypse* that are announced as real, such as Steven's unawareness of his staged environment? The programme does not address this obvious question. While it is suggested that the questioning of media authority is overall to be encouraged, viewers are not encouraged to apply this logic to the programme *Apocalypse* itself or to the presentation of Brown as an authoritative figure. For example, the critique that Steven might really be a confederate of Brown's and playing along with the scenario is anticipated by showing the elaborate preparations for the programme (hacking Stephen's devices, creating fake broadcasts,

soliciting help from his family), and the remote direction and stage-management of the other 'survivors'. Having shown the susceptibility of media systems and devices to exploitation, and the thoroughness with which, once hacked, they can dupe a member of the public, the structure of the programme discourages viewers from directing this robustly critical awareness towards *Apocalypse* itself. Instead, the show unequivocally advocates the idea of taking responsibility for productivity as a means to fulfilment and 'being the best that you can be'. This notion is further articulated in *Pushed to the Edge*, which takes a similar premise of immersing the individual in a staged, highly stressful scenario to monitor and intensify their process of self-growth. The following section focuses more closely on the model of productivity shown in the programme, which explicitly promotes the idea of self-improvement through choice-making, while creating an environment that seeks to undermine the legitimacy of those choices.

5.4 Participation and productivity in *Pushed to the Edge*

The protagonist of *Pushed to the Edge*, Chris, is approached by the director of a charity seeking to hire a web developer, who invites him to a fundraising auction. Like Steven, he is unaware that the situation is staged. Over the course of the auction, Chris becomes a bystander to a series of stressful events, from the vegetable canapés failing to arrive, to being at the scene when an important benefactor appears to die of heart failure. At each of these events, his collusion is requested by actors, for example in passing off meat-filled canapés as suitable for vegetarians, to stuffing the body of the benefactor into an empty crate and masquerading as him so that the evening can proceed as planned. Events escalate to the point where Chris is pressured verbally by the other characters to push the now-revived benefactor from a great height, to his implied death, in order to prevent legal action and possible prison sentences for the conspirators. At this stage, Chris refuses to comply with the social and psychological pressure, and instead leaves the scene. It is revealed that this scenario has been staged a further three times for three more protagonists, and that all three of them complied. The show opens with Brown performing a piece to camera concerning the 'dangers' of social compliance, which are 'something we should be aware of, *now more than ever*' (emphasis mine). Although the programme seems to promote the exercise of rational choice- thinking for oneself rather than surrendering to the wills of other individuals, groups, or institutions- this claim needs to be examined in relation to the modes of engagement and participation for which the show actually makes space.

This foregrounding of the experiences of the protagonists and the viewers in Brown's work recalls Adam Alston's characterisation of immersive theatre as entailing a 'particular form of audience productivity: the objectification of experience as art' (7). Audiences of immersive theatre intensify their participation by exerting themselves physically and cognitively, 'seeking, finding, unearthing, touching, liaising, communicating, exchanging, stumbling, meandering... by walking, interacting, dancing and even running', investing their energy in a way that exceeds 'that of sedentary, end-on theatre scenarios' (7-8). Here, '[t]he audience experience produced by an audience's relationships to a set of materials tends to be framed as the primary, aesthetically meaningful element in immersive theatre, alongside a series of other meanings attached to materials and bodies in an immersive space' (7). A consequence of this primacy of aestheticisation, for Alston, is that '[a]esthetic experiences in immersive theatre tend to promote introspection' (7), because the heightened (physical, cognitive, affective etc.) engagement and 'investment of energy' (8) that is required of the audience tends to supersede attention towards the art object. In other words, their exertions and engagements with the immersive theatre space are the primary focus of attention, rather than an external object. The term Alston uses to introduce and critique this intensification is 'productive participation', which is less 'a discrete category of engagement' than a term that captures 'a romanticism, modification and enhancement of an audience's inherent productivity' (4). It is also characterised by Alston as 'entrepreneurial participation' (11), which refers to the late-capitalist expectation that productivity is expected of workers and citizens. The neoliberal subject is 'a producer who labours in a bodily mode and whose "immaterial labour"... is co-opted as a source of capital in place of, or in addition to, manual labour' (16). For Alston, there are clear connections between an immersive theatre staging that romanticises the bodily, cognitive, and affective exertions of its audience as they productively participate, and the political context of such stagings in which immaterial labour is resourced as capital.

Thinking through the notion of productivity as it is framed by Alston sheds light on the productivity of the protagonists and the viewer in *Pushed to the Edge*. The key difference between *Pushed to the Edge* and the immersive stagings with which Alston is concerned is in the dual reality nature of the former. To take its premise seriously, is to accept that Chris and the other three protagonists are engaging with the world of the show as real rather than a staged fiction. Whatever sense they may have of themselves as productive subjects, at least for the majority of the programme, is not drawn from their immersion within a theatrical space, but rather the

everyday rules of operation in twenty-first century Britain. However, as with the immersive theatre that Alston describes, the participation required by protagonists of Brown's shows exceeds what is usual or normal in either 'live' or remediated performance magic, which in material terms is mostly restricted to such actions as selecting, hiding, and guessing objects in the course of performances. In street magic texts, spectators take on the further function of guaranteeing the reality of the effects and becoming part of the spectacle for the viewer, creating a disparity between the two categories of audience as a result. In *Pushed to the Edge*, this dynamic becomes even more heightened as Chris and the other protagonists are immersed into a staged world that is indistinguishable from reality, their exertions rather than the optical illusions of the magic effects providing the spectacle to be consumed by the viewer.

The protagonists' immaterial labour of 'introspection' is likewise rendered consumable at the end of the programme in short pieces to camera, as they offer up accounts of self-improvement for the benefit of an audience who can apply these useful lessons to their own lives. One protagonist talks about his greater self-knowledge, saying, 'I thought I was one of those people that wouldn't be that person, that I could make a stand and say, "No, I'm not going to do that"'. Others report a renewed determination to stand up for themselves and be less compliant, and a desire to live life to the fullest 'and not let other people influence me'. Meanwhile, Chris remarks, 'I think, definitely, when certain situations present themselves, do think about it before you act upon it, and think "What am I doing?"'. In giving this piece of advice, and presuming the ability to exercise a free choice of one's course of action under the circumstances, Chris positions the viewers as possessing a similar capacity for agency and self-reflection- thinking before you act- that they can deploy in ambiguous 'certain situations'. Although 'the push' is announced as the climactic choice-making moment in the show, the protagonists' agency to choose is also thus displayed at the end of the programme when they account for their experiences to the camera.

As well as Alston's notion of the objectification of experience as art, another useful site of critical engagement with *Pushed to the Edge* is the idea of choice as it appears in reality television, especially the notion that happiness and fulfilment can be found through making the right choices. Scholars in this area have highlighted the pervasive discourse of self-improvement to fulfil one's obligation to be a productive citizen (Andrejevic 2004; Ouellette and Hay 2008; Skeggs and Wood 2012). Laurie Ouellette and James Hay find that the project of making the self over has a history in the cultural industries stretching back to the early twentieth century; yet the contemporary 'impetus to facilitate, improve and makeover people's health, happiness and

success through television programming is tied to distinctly "neoliberal" reasoning about governance and social welfare' (471). *Pushed to the Edge* could belong to Ouellette and Hays' politically charged category of 'life intervention programming', which enacts 'a concern to facilitate care of the self as a strategy of freedom and empowerment' (475). They argue that as welfare programmes in the United States are increasingly scaled down or outsourced, such that 'healthy citizens' must be produced 'in new ways' that depend upon private resources, citizens have an obligation to be entrepreneurial in their attitudes towards their well-being and happiness, and television has become an instrument to accomplish this (481). This can appear in reality television as an 'expert' presenter guiding a participant to make more nutritious food choices (*Secret Eaters*, 2012- 14), more flattering sartorial choices, (*What Not to Wear*, 2001- 07), or more socially acceptable 'lifestyle' choices (*How Clean is Your House?*, 2003- 08).

The notion of value in reality television is also relevant here. Skeggs and Wood argue that value in this context is not only 'extractional', in reality television's resourcing of 'ordinary people' and 'everyday life' to 'turn into financial capital', but also possesses performative and relational dimensions (7). That is, as performers, reality television participants not only have 'value extracted from them through their performance', 'they also have to display value to others through the conditions created by programme formats' (7). In the discourse of such programmes, it is the individual's responsibility to improve themselves, to be seen to display value through making 'right' choices, even as value is extracted from them. This is apparent, for example, during the interviews, where it seems the protagonists have unilaterally chosen to interpret the programme as an opportunity for self-growth. An experience that might, in other circumstances, be understood as a traumatic revelation about how ordinary people will commit evil acts given enough pressure, gradual conditioning, and few resources to exercise reflexive judgement, is reported at the end of the programme as a positive experience that has transformed them for the better. A sense of gratitude to Brown is expressed in their responses, although whether this affirmative response may be linked to the 'gift' of a transformative experience or the relief of any guilt about their actions is unclear. In these cases, even the three protagonists who made the 'wrong', unethical choice to push argue that they have ultimately reaped the immaterial reward of self-improvement for their labour. It can be further argued that this display of value is intended to encourage viewers to identify with the protagonists and their experiences, to think about how they may be applied to their own future choices.

That the lessons of the programme are directed at the viewer is evident in one moment

in the show when Brown addresses the camera whilst seated in the control room from which he is stage-managing and directing the scenario, 'This is a really tricky moment for Chris, and you might want to consider what you would do in this situation. Would you bring the whole event crashing to an embarrassing halt, or would you pretend to be the main benefactor who you know is dead in the next room?' In this moment, the programme demonstrates its reflexivity by encouraging viewers to empathise and identify with the protagonist. An excerpt from Brown's closing monologue also extrapolates its outcomes to a population that is imagined to be in dire need of help:

This experiment wasn't about who pushed and who didn't. This was designed to make participants act in a way that went against their decent values, morals, and personalities. The point is, we're all profoundly susceptible to this kind of influence, whether it's driven by our peer group or an ideology. It's like we're handed other people's scripts of how to live our lives, to achieve their ambitions and beliefs. By understanding it, by understanding how we can be manipulated, we can become stronger. We can say 'no'... We can push back.

Though viewers themselves are not 'immersed' in the staged world of *Pushed to the Edge*, they *are* positioned as immersed in a real world that presents similar difficulties of unfair, coercive environments that delegitimise their choices, that require them to make judgement calls and exercise critical thinking in order to live life to the fullest, to be the best that they can be, and to push back. They, too, must learn to perform the immaterial labour of choosing rightly, as modelled by the protagonists.

To facilitate this mode of critical, reflexive engagement, it is important to ensure that viewers understand themselves as observers of an interesting and controversial experiment rather than potential witnesses to a disaster. Since the format involves placing an unsuspecting person in a situation of extreme stress which could potentially cause severe harm, the ethics of *Pushed to the Edge* are clearly problematic. The programme requires viewers to accept that, although the situation is staged, Chris' responses are genuine and not directed or scripted, and taking this premise seriously could lead the audience to become concerned for his wellbeing. This negotiation reflects the tension between immediacy and hypermediacy, between signalling unmediation and multiplying media, that Bolter and Grusin identify as characteristic of remediation. Though the multiple-camera set-up provides a sense of immediate and direct access to the events of the programme and Chris' thoughts and feelings as he navigates the environment

of the show, it also multiplies the mediating apparatus to suggest the exclusion of any backstage sleight of hand. Therefore, the programme also uses a range of strategies to reassure viewers that they need not fear for the safety of the protagonists, while emphasising that events are 'really' happening as represented, and that the protagonists believe that the context in which they make the choice to push or not to push is 'real'.

Some of these strategies are drawn from reality television conventions. For example, the foregrounding of the selection process may remind viewers of the format of reality shows such as the internationally successful *Got Talent*, *Idol* and *X Factor* franchises, in which the process of auditioning the would-be stars is acknowledged and incorporated into the show. Where those auditionees must display an extraordinary gift for singing or dancing in order to be chosen, Chris and the other protagonists are selected because of their personalities rather than any purposefully honed talents or skills. As such, *Pushed to the Edge* could be identified with the 'no-talent formats' identified by Kavka in which contestants' labour is constituted by 'being themselves', and which therefore 'insist on ordinariness rather than exceptionality' (*Reality TV* 160). For viewers who are familiar with such texts, this association with light entertainment perhaps invites a mode of viewing that enjoys other people's affective reactions as spectacle. Another strategy borrowed from reality television that communicates the reality of the events is a fixed-rig 'hidden camera' method of filming. This is often used in pranking shows, mentioned previously in this chapter in relation to *Twisted Tales*, but also appears in reality television texts in which highly affectively charged moments are resourced (or generated) for television, such as *One Born Every Minute* (2010- present), which captures the activity of a UK maternity unit, and *First Dates* (2013- present), set in a restaurant and showing people sharing dinner with potential romantic interests. This method allows intimate moments to be captured unobtrusively, rendering other people's emotional lives surveillable and legible to the viewer. *Pushed to the Edge* likewise seems to draw most of its material from cameras that monitor the protagonists constantly, hidden in a fixed rig throughout the gala venue. This can also be seen as a way of ensuring their wellbeing. As the production team have a vested interest in monitoring the protagonists in order to realise the narrative of the programme, it may be argued that they are even safer in these circumstances than in their everyday life. A third strategy that signals the reality status of the programme is the reflexivity performed by the protagonists as they recount their experiences to camera. This demonstrates that viewers should similarly make the most of the opportunity the programme offers them, and find ways to improve their lives by exercising

choice. These interviews retroactively sanction the extreme interventions of *Pushed to the Edge* by verifying the experience as a primarily positive one, the happy outcome justifying any potential risks.

Another strategy for managing risk, more in keeping with performance magic conventions, is to appeal to the efficacy of Brown as a causal figure, one who literally runs the show. Brown appears in various guises in *Pushed to the Edge*; introducing the narrative in short segments to camera; directing the actors through earpieces in a control room; appearing on the scene to debrief protagonists when they exit the reality that has been staged for them, ensuring the effective stage management of the situation as well as their psychological well-being. He is a presenter interrupting the flow of the narrative to contextualise the show and invite viewers to engage critically and empathically, a principal investigator leading a team of scientists, and a director realising a vision for a performance by giving the actors instructions. He appears to be a figure of powerful causality and symbolic capacity, able to command the material studio space and the immaterial workings of the human mind, such that any wonder or awe generated is directed at Brown himself, rather than the spectacles of his illusions.

The moments where he debriefs protagonists especially reveal the potency of this symbolic capacity. Upon encountering Brown after the push, one of the protagonists immediately recognises him, and in that instant seems to realise that he has been duped. His body slumps in a release of tension, and he begins to laugh. The sight of Brown alone, without any kind of explanatory discourse, is sufficient to provide the moment of revelation for this person. A similar scene occurs at the end of *Apocalypse*: as soon as Steven sees Brown, he smiles with relief. Brown's capacity as a figure to signify elaborate deception is even put to use outside his own shows. He appears briefly as himself in an episode of *Sherlock* (2010- present), a drama that reimagines the Sherlock Holmes novels, as part of an improbable theory that Sherlock's apparent death was faked, with Brown temporarily placing Watson into a trance state while one body is substituted for another ('The Empty Hearse'). Brown's compelling persona itself perhaps fulfils a need to imagine extraordinary agents at work to rationalise a chaotic and disturbing world. This tactic resonates with the image of the 'tyrannical master' 'who pulls the strings behind the scenes', a paranoid response to the irrationality of late capitalism (Andrejevic 214). The 'tyrannical master' appeals to a population for whom knowledge is alienated from action, because it enables us to imagine that 'all we need to do is purge the system of the few villains who have seized control' in order to restore democracy (Andrejevic 214). Brown's efficacy, his ability to influence people to

commit acts which override their social conditioning or individual consciences, confirms the fantasy of the master manipulator while also allowing viewers to displace any sense that they might witness something dangerous. The effect of these strategies is to reassure viewers that they can gaze without risk, assured they will not inadvertently become witnesses to somebody's serious, permanent harm. They do not need to perform their own risk assessment because another entity- the camera, the director, the post-production editor or, implicitly, Brown himself as a composite of these functions- has already performed it for them, mediating the potential for risk and making safe the experience of viewing.

This very gesture, of negotiating ethical responsibilities using reassurance, retroactive sanctioning, and an appeal to Brown's powers, rather than (for example) a frank acknowledgement of such responsibilities and transparency regarding the ways in which the producers have tried to meet them, enhances a generalised sense of the illusions and manipulations of everyday life to which the programme appeals, rather than dispelling them. Returning to the statement regarding reenactments on Brown's website, it is acknowledged that a psychologist might struggle to secure funding if an experiment were likely to attract controversy or involve deceiving subjects but 'a television show... might revel in both those factors' ('Psychological and Sociological Experiments'). This statement clearly expresses the primacy of entertainment in Brown's work. The incitement to 'push back' is perhaps deliberately vague; against whom or what should we be pushing? And what form should the pushing take? The dilemma discussed earlier with reference to *Apocalypse* also applies to *Pushed to the Edge*: should a refusal to be manipulated also apply to our reception of Brown's shows? And, given that he is a part of the media institutions and apparatus that normalise these malign influences, on what basis does Brown align himself with the 'we' of the viewer? There is little space for reflecting on these issues throughout the programme, as the viewer's scepticism and criticality is not invited with respect to this particular text. *Pushed to the Edge* may arguably 'go beyond magic' in that it imagines illusion as a powerful influence in the viewer's lives of which they are unaware, so directly addressing issues of manipulation and control that are often veiled in performance magic. Yet this remains abstract. The imperative to 'push back' sounds empowering and subversive, but it is not clear that this invitation to viewers to mobilise one's agency and apply critical thinking extends to *Pushed to the Edge* itself as a media text. Rather, it uses strategies drawn from both reality television and performance magic to displace ethical responsibility from its producers and viewers, such that viewers are not encouraged to take the imperative to 'push back' seriously in

relation to the figure giving this command.

Compared to Blaine and Dynamo, Brown's work is overall concerned less with producing a sense of a subjective, narrative journey using the spectacular attractions of magic effects, and more with the exploring the thematic potential of the mysterious human mind. The appeal to a broader notion of illusion than that which is expressed in visual effects, and the intrigue of immaterial psychological methods may perhaps contribute to the notion that Brown's work can be located 'beyond magic'. However, this chapter proposed that Brown's work is a conscious hybrid of both televisual and performance conventions that reaches back into the past, drawing on historical elements of performance magic, and so can be understood as returning to what has gone before, rather than 'beyond'.

In *The Heist*, Brown's agency conditions and stages the entire scenario, using reenactment to produce desires for historical knowledge in the past and scientific knowledge in the present. While its status as reenactment is called upon to legitimate the events of the programme as an experiment, it is also used to justify the lack of clinical standards applied to them. It therefore seems to occupy an indeterminate space between fiction and reality. The Milgram experiment follows the principle of magic effects in creating a dual reality, further congealing the explanatory myths of psychology and affirming Brown's extraordinary and inexplicable powers. *Séance* also creates a desire for knowledge and meets this with an epistemic uncertainty, restaging paranormal spectacles and presenting their reality status as ambiguous. Brown draws upon performance magic's 'pro-rationalist' past to accomplish this, continuing the Victorian-era tradition of debunking performances that appeared to challenge the existence of such supernatural occurrences as séances, but in fact served to intertwine them further within a spectacular entertainment culture. The idea that paranormal events *can* be convincingly faked, not that they necessarily *are* all faked, is a way of allowing Brown and the viewers to move through the 'revolving door' of belief and scepticism (Hill 75), rather than committing to one position or the other.

As well as these references to past performance conditions and practices, Brown's work draws on various media texts to situate his programmes within broader sets of cultural references, and create the immersive environments that characterise his more recent work. The intertextuality of the zombie that allows its remediation in *Apocalypse* also enables it to represent a tangle of anxieties over media and its capacity to influence viewers. Though the primary spectacle of the programme is Steven's transformation, rather than the violence of zombie battle,

the tropes of epidemic and contagion that characterise zombie film texts are retained in *Apocalypse*. It can thus be read as a call against the social ‘diseases’ of entitlement and complacency, transmitted through media, that prevent us from being the best that we can be. The remediation of zombie texts in *Apocalypse* reflexively points to the contingency and corruptibility of all media, but place the viewer in the paranoid position of not being able to trust *any* media content- including *Apocalypse*- as a result. These extreme interventions are continued in *Pushed to the Edge*, which uses the reality television structure of ‘making over’ the self to enact a transformation of several unsuspecting protagonists. Relying on the rhetoric of choice and personal growth to retroactively sanction the traumatic potential of the scenario in which the protagonists find themselves, the programme seems to anticipate critiques of its ethics by reassuring viewers that the participants experienced the show positively and demonstrating that their safety was prioritised throughout. Although the works considered in this chapter openly acknowledge the desire for knowledge that performance magic seems to provoke in the viewer, they tend to reproduce the overarching structures of illusion and opacity that, according to the texts themselves, characterise the media culture of the twenty-first century. The visions and spirits Brown raises may not be paranormal, but his interventions nevertheless conjure up performance magic’s past and merge it with popular media to speak to audiences in the present.

6. Conclusion: seeing and believing

It's 04 June 2015, a warm, sunny day, and Dynamo is performing in Birmingham's Victoria Square. The event, promoting an upcoming show at the Barclaycard Arena in the city, was announced the previous day on Twitter, and it's 4 pm on a Thursday. Perhaps this is why a crowd of only fifty or so has gathered. Dynamo is miked up and stands upon the lip of the fountain in the south-west of the square, placing himself a couple of feet above the heads of the audience gathered around him, surrounded by burly male minders in black and wearing sunglasses. He has been performing for around twenty minutes and drawn in a few more people, but has not solicited much enthusiasm. Many of us seem to be only vaguely aware of who he is, asking each other, 'What he's been in? Where do I know him from?' I am standing behind a group of young women, one of whom hopes he can predict her lottery numbers. She is prescient, as the big finale turns out to be a prediction routine. 'We'll just do this last one and then I'll come and do selfies with you,' Dynamo tells us. He throws a screwed-up piece of paper into the audience and asks us to pass it around while we select numbers within a specific range, meanwhile writing them down on a piece of paper on a clipboard. The ball of paper makes its way to me! I fumble and drop it, everyone laughs, Dynamo smiles kindly and asks me to pick a number between twenty-five and thirty-five. I choose twenty-seven. When six numbers have been randomly selected in this way, Dynamo tells us the odds that he has predicted our selection correctly are 1 in 14,983,816- which are also the odds of winning the British National Lottery. He pulls a lottery ticket from his back pocket and asks another of us to read its numbers aloud. They are the same as those we, as a crowd, selected, and this finally gets people excited. After the applause and cheers have died down, it's time for the promised selfies. One of the minders, keen to expedite the process, advises us, 'If you make sure your phones are all on selfie mode, we can make sure you all get one.' The same people who minutes earlier were trying to establish exactly who Dynamo was, now come up to his side one by one or in small groups to pose for their selfies. For the most part, the only words exchanged between them are 'Hi' and 'Thanks', if any are spoken at all. I decide against hanging around for a selfie of my own, and instead get a shot of the crowd queueing patiently for their proof of presence. (From the author's notes)



Figure 11. The Victoria Square audience waiting for selfies with Dynamo. Taken by the author.

The notes above report a performance that took place in a space and time shared by its audience, and thus generates a different dynamic than the televisual encounters with which this thesis has been concerned.¹⁷ Nevertheless, it presents a collision of mediated encounters that reflects the multiply mediated nature of performance magic in the twenty-first century, as an event that is not confined to a single space, time, media form, or purpose. To unpack this: a performer primarily known for his work on television takes to the streets for an apparently spontaneous public performance, to generate interest in a much more orchestrated and monetised public performance in one of Birmingham's largest capacity venues, to take place at a later date. The smaller scale performance is to have a life beyond its present moment, remaining both in the selfies, to be disseminated across social media platforms or messaging apps, and as a

¹⁷ Mobile phone footage of this event recorded by another spectator can be found at: youtu.be/BB5eF4633Io, accessed on 08 Mar. 2018.

local news item that builds anticipation for the forthcoming run at the Barclaycard Arena.¹⁸ The arena show is appropriately titled for a magician who achieved his renown through visual media: *Seeing is Believing*. This layering of various mediated elements has implications across many temporalities and spatialities; in the moment of performance on the street, an approximation of the televisual conditions in which Dynamo is known for performing; in the prior knowledge and expectations, or gaps in these ('What's he been in? Where do I know him from?'), that audiences bring to the encounter; in the promise of future encounters either in the purpose-built, overtly theatrical space of the arena, or a more nebulous cyberspace constituted by the sharing of digital objects. It is remarkable that the effect of condensing these various planes into one event was not one of incoherence nor confusion. Perhaps it was the nature of the event as performance magic, a practice that challenges what audiences think they know about the world around them, or perhaps the embeddedness of media in our everyday lives that meant we, the spectators, could consider the encounter as both here and not here, 'live' due to our co-presence and participation, mediated by our prior knowledge of magic and by the devices used to capture the moment, located in the present moment but also to be saved and shared later. The notion that the media associated with performance magic have multiplied to include social media has implications for future study, and so will be revisited later in this conclusion.

In an attempt to explore how performance magic has adapted to a media context that alternately resists and embraces the notions of enchantment and illusion, this thesis asked what individual performers have retained of past practices, and how they have embraced the affordances of television and its discourses. It has thus sought an inclusive understanding of performance magic as a category that accommodates media practices, recognising the adaptability of the form and how it resonates with the contemporary concerns, fantasies, and anxieties of its audiences. By examining forms that are intended to be recorded and broadcast through mediating technology, namely the street magic of David Blaine and Dynamo and the psychological illusions of Derren Brown, it has made the case for both the validity of televised forms as a category of performance magic, and their specificity as distinct from magic that is not technologically mediated. The research for this study consisted of closely reading a selection of television shows by these key practitioners using frameworks of performance, media and cultural theory. The existing literature on performance magic was key in establishing the interplay of

¹⁸ The Barclaycard Arena was renamed 'Arena Birmingham' in September 2017.

fiction and reality in televised magic effects, as well as Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation, and Gundle and Castelli and Roach's explorations of illusion in the wider public sphere. This method has enabled comparison and contrast between different bodies of work, so that this thesis has sought to illuminate points of contact between a constellation of texts in a way that also marks their differences. This conclusion will identify these points of connection and divergence, before proceeding to discuss the possibilities for future work in this area.

The case study texts use a range of televisual strategies and conventions with the aim of establishing the 'realness' and authenticity of the effects. In Blaine's work, these include the 'demotic' (G. Turner 171) use of ordinary people as media content, with their reactions heavily incorporated into the text and so forming part of the spectacle. Moreover, the hypermediated representation of actual geographical locations affirms their 'realness', but ensures they are nevertheless mediated through imaginings of the familiar everyday and exotic elsewhere that are normative to Britain and the US. The notion of surveillance and its attendant concepts of self-discipline and self-monitoring recur in Blaine's endurance pieces, mirroring a contemporary trend in reality television. The use of real people and places is shared by Dynamo, whose work is moreover structured around autobiographical narratives that resource 'realness' as a dimension of his celebrity persona. Referring to a 'moment before fame' (Littler 15) and constructing the performance environments through his subjective experience places the emphasis on everyday realities that nevertheless contain an element of enchantment. In Derren Brown's work, there is an appeal to the viewer's desire for knowledge about how the manipulative illusions of the everyday operate, a desire to which the text responds by offering an illusion of transparency. This is achieved through placing unsuspecting protagonists at the centre of elaborately staged, highly stressful scenarios of crisis and monitoring them throughout. Their 'immaterial labour' (Alston 16) appears as an intensified productivity, reflexivity, and accrual of value, serving as a model for viewers. The centrality of the performance and improvement of self in reality television is reflected in Brown's works, which insist on the extraordinary individuality and causal agency of Brown himself.

Performance magic is remediated in each of these texts, creating hybrid works that sometimes place more emphasis on the televisual real at the expense of a real or imagined theatrical past. Through their association with media discourses that communicate 'reality' such as documentary and news broadcasts, Blaine's body performances invite the audience to believe that there is no element of fiction that might undermine the risky nature of his endeavours, hence

Mangan's description of stunts like *Above the Below* and *Dive of Death* as 'non-matrixed magic' (189). This disavowal is also present in Brown's rejection of hypnotism as 'play-acting', which mobilises associations of theatre and theatricality with misleading falsehood, and thereby designates his own activities as genuine and authentic, so that viewers are encouraged to consider the events as 'real' rather than staged fictions. Through dedifferentiation, *Magician Impossible* also challenges viewers to discern between moments of performance and spectacle, and those of 'real life'. Incorporating home video and references to a life that exists prior to that of the celebrity persona, as well as blending spaces for work and leisure, contribute to the impression that Dynamo is always performing. Resisting theatrical modes of fiction, which after all define the past traditions of performance magic, in favour of televisual modes of realness that make use of the medium's capacity for immediacy, suggests an ostensible commitment to one medium at the expense of another.

However, the hybridity of these shows means they frequently reference diverse 'live' performance practices and other traditions of fiction that trouble both this commitment and the relationship to realness that is claimed for them. Blaine's work alludes to contemporary hip-hop forms, the highly public and publicised escapes of Harry Houdini who also brought magic 'to the people' (Ryan), and body art performances of the twentieth century. Blaine often avoids directly naming or acknowledging these associations, but despite (or perhaps because of) this, these points of reference ground his works in past 'live' performances, such that past theatrical traditions of performance magic cannot be dismissed unproblematically. Brown's work also summons 'live' performance practices. His staging of a Victorian-era séance recalls debunking performances of the same period, adapting their repertoire and sharing in their purpose, as magicians of this era sought to demonstrate that apparently paranormal spiritualist phenomena could be recreated without supernatural means. As Brown's work itself locates theatre as the domain of 'play acting', this complicates *Séance's* claims to a straightforward and trustworthy reality devoid of fictional elements. Meanwhile, Dynamo seems to improvise his magic with people and objects encountered among the urban spaces in which he performs, so placing a value on the transient experience of the magic effect. As well as performance practices, other modes and genres of fiction, especially film, are more directly referenced in the case study episodes, notably live-action superhero films and zombie disaster movies. In these episodes, television remediates multiple forms of popular entertainment as well as insisting that the magic effects shown take place in a 'real' space and time, perhaps supporting Bolter and Grusin's argument that

'[j]ust as it remediates film or other media, television remediates the real' (194). Understanding television as able to simulate reality and remediate fictional modes suggests that television can successfully generate 'fictions of the real', as During describes performance magic (58).

'Fictions of the real' are achieved not only through the effects themselves, but in generating the public personas of these practitioners. Blaine appears as a mystical 'urban shaman' who capitalises upon the ambiguity of his effects to trouble the boundaries between efficacious magic and that which is just for play, Dynamo as an ordinary local kid who has achieved fame through hard work and talent, and Brown as a dapper showman who possesses complete control over the theatrical and studio spaces within which he operates. In mentioning this, it is vital to acknowledge that these personas are conditioned by external factors, with differences in the image repertoires of power and authority that are available to these performers. Brown's white, middle-class masculinity enables him to cultivate a mannered persona able to indulge in literary, cinematic, and historical references. Blaine's heritage includes Puerto Rican, Italian, and Russian Jewish ancestry, and Dynamo's comprises white British and Pakistani. It seems reasonable to suggest this association of the idioms of the city and the street with performers of colour, and the conventions of British popular entertainment overseen by the authoritative and masterful showman with whiteness, is a result of these practitioners making use of the image repertoires available to them in a way that ultimately reinforces normative perceptions of the identity categories to which they appear to belong. In merging fiction and reality through the remediating power of television, albeit to different degrees in different texts, televised performance magic is connected to the wider landscape of contemporary media and its concerns to present an immediate and transparent reality, but is unable, or unwilling, to divest itself completely of its theatrical past, and the meanings of fiction and reality that reside there.

In summoning this complex blend of fiction and reality, a range of engagements are made possible in televised magic between the viewer and that which unfolds on screen. In the case studies of Blaine and Dynamo's work, the spectator appears as a representative of the viewer, her proxy in the text, giving her cues that what she is seeing is really taking place. For the viewer, the spectator's reactions become part of the pleasurable spectacle available for consumption alongside the magic effects. A relation of empathic identification between viewer and spectator is more apparent in Brown's immersive shows, in which the spectator is positioned as a protagonist acting within a world staged just for them, and the viewer is openly invited to reflect on how they might respond in similar situations. Brown's protagonists thus model the benefits of

such virtues as reflexivity, critical thinking, and self-improvement, that are deemed necessary for the viewer to cultivate in a dangerous culture full of illusions. The viewer is addressed in Brown's work as an entrepreneurial, self-interested subject seeking to improve their value, productivity, and happiness.

Further possibilities for engagement emerge in the notion of risk in these texts. There are many instances in the case studies where the viewer is positioned as a potential witness to risky or transgressive activity that stresses the indeterminacy, therefore 'realness', of the events represented. However, the extent of the risks varies between texts. In Blaine's endurance works, where the incessant monitoring of Blaine's body allows it to be read as extraordinary by his willingness to take risks, there may be a perception that the risks are 'real' which is seriously undercut when the performances are interrupted, as in *Dive of Death*. Meanwhile, the reality of Brown's psychologically gruelling shows requires retroactive sanctioning and reassurance of a positive outcome. By contrast, the reality status of Dynamo's feat of walking on water where the appearance of a police boat implicates him as a potential criminal is playfully undermined within the text. A shared editorial strategy is adopted that draws upon the capacity of television to effectively perform a risk assessment on behalf of the viewer, remediating the real to ensure that this position of 'potential witness' remains a rhetorical possibility rather than an actual eventuality. As with acts from the repertoire of stage illusion like 'Sawing a Woman', the texts foreclose the possibility of *real* violence and tragedy, so that the potential for actual risk is diminished. This even occurs with *Dive of Death* with its remediation into a documentary form, where the climax of the 'dive' is displaced into a bullet catch effect that conforms more easily to performance magic's standard repertoire. The forms of engagement that are solicited by these television texts challenge During's notion that 'magic shows require... few competencies to enjoy (2), since they depend upon an audience's competency and familiarity with culturally specific, although perhaps increasingly globally adopted, conventions of television and other media. To take up the invitations offered by Blaine, Dynamo, and Brown, and traverse Hill's revolving door of belief and scepticism (75), audiences need to know how to read and judge televisual modes of reality and fiction.

As a final point, it can be observed from these case studies that the shift to televisual representations and simulations of the 'real world' also enables practitioners to affirm the illusory or illusion-generating tendencies of many aspects of 'real', everyday life, such as the 'glamour' (Gundle and Castelli 2006) and 'secular magic' (Roach 2007) of urban living, celebrity, and media

technology. To different degrees, the case studies all align with Landy and Saler's thesis that enchantment is an inherent quality of modernity, acknowledging that everyday experience contains some elements of fantasy, illusion, or unreality. Blaine's mission to bring magic to people on the streets contains a sense that the banality of the everyday needs to be interrupted by a moment of wonder, in order for the jaded senses of urban dwellers to be awakened through the surprise and astonishment that his effects provide. The self-description of 'urban shaman' implies a concentrated and innate power that is available to be read as supernaturally efficacious, intervening in the everyday by shaking up the normal rules of its operation. Dynamo's work, on the other hand, seems to posit that enchantment is already present in everyday life, running like electricity beneath the surfaces and systems of the modern city. The forms of secular magic represented in *Magician Impossible* are the resilience and community spirit found in locales as diverse as Bradford and New York, the ability of mediating technology to create the illusion of walking on water or levitating above the Shard, the gilded life of celebrity, and the transformative potential of hedonistic leisure time in exotic places. Here, illusion is presented as a facet of contemporary everyday life. Conversely, in presenting everyday life as a site of illusion, Brown highlights viewers' complacency in the dangerous and misleading manipulations of mediating technology, staging seemingly convincing simulations of real life to arouse a desire for knowledge about how these illusions operate. The works are structured to avoid the charge that Brown himself may be complicit in such a system, by apparently offering viewers a better understanding of the conditions around them as well as the tools of critical thought and the desire to self-improve. Thus, the status of these works as illusions is left intact, and their appeal for transformation does not extend to the political, social, or cultural context that supports them. Though they approach the relation between enchantment or illusion and everyday, ordinary life differently, these examples of televised magic are all invested in representing the two as connected and affirming rather than critiquing or challenging this relation.

As the conclusions of this thesis have so far been concerned with the temporalities of past and present, at this point it seems appropriate to turn to the future, specifically, the possibilities for future research that this work suggests. One potential course would be to attend to other media forms used by mainstream magicians as venues for performances of illusion. This study has already mentioned the entrepreneurial labour of performing the self and engaging with fans that is obligatory for celebrities in the twenty-first century. The analysis by Gundle and Castelli and Roach in section 2.3 of this study attests that the labour of stars and celebrities as 'performers'

has long been exerted outside the medium for which they are primarily known. Glamour and the secular magic of 'It' in these texts describe the use of visual media in the past to stimulate desire for objects or people, suggesting that these enchantments are a necessary element of modernity. In the twenty-first century, where the presence of visual media has intensified and now offers at least the appearance of interactivity and participation, social media and other branding activities may offer other sites for magicians to perform their illusions.

Different media strategies are evident for each of the performers whose works have been analysed in this thesis. Performing a brief audit of each performer's Twitter feed on 21 November 2017 by way of example, the content of David Blaine's account (@davidblaine) consists mainly of infrequent retweets, interactions with fans, and cross-posts from his Instagram account, including videos of close-up magic performed at conventions, and a few photos apparently from a recent holiday. This last aside, this channel seems more geared towards providing fans with information regarding Blaine's professional activities than with building intimacy. Dynamo's Twitter feed (@Dynamomagician), on the other hand, draws upon his engagement with other celebrities and fans at the same time as publicising his primary activities. As with Blaine, the feed integrates content from different platforms that focus mainly on digital visual media such as photo and video. This content includes collaborations with YouTube stars, a video of a young fan performing magic before him that clearly seeks to elicit an affective response from viewers, and 'behind the scenes' images from filming. He seems likeable, available, and responsive to interactions, suggesting an illusion of closeness that may nevertheless be meaningful to fans. The content of Derren Brown's feed (@DerrenBrown) is wider ranging but heavily curated, from a retweeted article reviewing a collection of essays by Oliver Sacks, pictures of his pet birds and reptiles with whimsical captions, and praise for books authored by friends and acquaintances. Here, Brown makes himself available less by demonstrating a willingness to engage with fans, and more by purposefully displaying his tastes and values. This is just one media platform that magicians may use to build their brand and persona. A conference paper by the author of this study entitled 'Magicians' Autobiography as Performance' (2015) argues that materials such as published autobiographies telling the celebrity life story, that draw on the past to construct persona in the present, could also provide useful insight into the connections between magicians' public images and their performance practices. Looking briefly at social media activity, however, suggests a range of priorities and commitments among magicians that have achieved mainstream renown. Sustained investigation into online personas and branding appearances may offer a more

cohesive sense of how contemporary magicians use a range of media practices and strategies to perform illusions, outside their primary platforms.

Future research may also consider other critical perspectives to analyse the extent to which specific factors other than the proliferation of mediating technologies may condition contemporary performance magic practices. Currently, the academic literature on performance magic consists of historical analysis discusses the form in a range of cultural contexts (During 2002; Mangan 2007; Coppa, Hass, and Peck 2008), small-scale studies in psychology and cognitive science (Rensink and Kuhn 2008), research into highly specific arenas of practice (Jones 2011; Landman 2015; Taylor and Nolan 2015), and discussions in relation to other practices such as film (North 2001; Gunning 2004; Kember 2011), television (Sexton 2015; 2018), and spiritualist performance (Natale 2016). This body of literature is immensely valuable in opening up the analysis of performance magic from a range of critical standpoints. Theory on the performance of gender may be one such productive framework, as gender issues are often noted with regard to performance magic but are underexplored in practice. Talking with a male magician regarding the gender imbalance, as practitioners are still overwhelmingly male, he readily acknowledged the disparity and expressed a belief that communities and organisations are finding effective ways to redress the balance; yet a 2016 profile of the female mentalist Katherine Mills estimates the number of female magicians who have gained entry to the prestigious Magic Circle at sixty, out of around 1500 members in total (Ahmed).

Such work may build on *Trade of the Tricks* (2011), Graham M. Jones' ethnographic study of the Parisian magic community as subculture, in which Jones 'considers symbolic linkages established within the subculture of French magic between particular aesthetic features and certain essentialist notions of gender, and the way magicians- male and female, queer and straight- negotiate gender norms in conjuring' (121). Jones suggests that while male magicians are concerned by the comparatively small female presence in their practice and do not seek to exclude women, there are barriers specific to the subculture of performance magic, such as 'feelings of isolation, the added scrutiny that comes with minority status, sexual harassment, and cultural pressures to conform to feminine ideals' (138), as well as broader associations of creativity (138), potency (142), and symbolic violence (147) with masculinity, that decrease the appeal of performance magic for women. 'Queer magic', as a form through which magicians 'assert creative agency through presentations that play with the constraints of convention' (159), is alluded to by Jones as a practice that has yet to be fully realised. Future work might thus

consider how performance magic may negotiate or play with constraining, essentialist notions of gender, and how practitioners use it as a tool to express queer identities. Interviews and ethnographic research such as that undertaken by Jones might provide useful insights as to the strategies employed by the male-dominated organisations that formally and informally regulate practice to broaden the appeal of performance magic to women, and the effectiveness of these strategies. Such work could contribute to understanding a range of pressures that shape contemporary performance magic, and so provide valuable insight as to its survival and relevance in the twenty-first century.

A final area in which performance magic may be of interest in theatre and performance, and cognate disciplines, is in audience research. The range of audience engagements in performance magic invites consideration of participation and productivity in analysis of the form, and this study has followed the methods of Andrejevic (2004), Biressi and Nunn (2006), and Kavka (2008; 2012), amongst many others concerned with the significations of television and significance to its audiences, in looking to the possibilities of engagement offered by the text. While this approach does give insight into the kinds of responses and interpretations that the texts themselves open and foreclose, they cannot offer a fuller picture of how audiences comply with, negotiate, or resist the demands of the text. This might be achieved with empirical research.

The idea of talking to audiences to learn about them is far from new in theatre and performance research, although work still needs to be done to integrate this approach into academic discussion, as is evident from a themed section of a 2015 issue of the journal *Participations*. The editors Sedgeman and Reason note a '*feeling of absence*' (117, emphasis in original) of empirical research on theatre audiences. They understand this as sometimes a result of 'a partial disciplinary myopia, a failure to look across the boundaries of subjects or methodologies', anticipating 'a critical mass' of work concerned with empirical methods that could highlight existing perspectives and future possibilities of this approach (118). Researchers in television studies, a discipline from which this thesis has drawn much, are also attuned to the necessity for empirical research in learning how audiences respond to, think and feel about, the interventions of media in their lives. In a work previously cited in this thesis, Skeggs and Wood argue that although television has been considered to '[operate] as a technology of governmentality', '[offering] instructions to audiences which are useful in a current neoliberal epoch where the motif of self-responsibility assists in the withdrawal of state support and in generating bodies ripe for the conditions of the flexible labour market', 'it is another step to

assume that governmentality works' (4). They use what they describe as 'multimethods', including interviewing, viewing sessions, and focus groups (13), and the mode of 'reaction' to interrogate the assumption 'that governmentality works' and attendant extrapolations about how audiences respond to media interventions. They draw upon audience research that 'has used the framework of emotion to understand meaning' but choose to emphasise 'the immediate, the everyday and the indeterminate' to explore 'the workings of "affect" as a force in the social relations between audience and television' (5). There is potential for the tools of empirical audience research to be useful for both 'live' and technologically mediated performance magic. Doing so might offer an understanding of how audiences engage with performance magic, questioning for example whether they take up the invitations to believe or be sceptical, how they work through what they are watching to understand it as fiction or reality, and so extend the present study's research into contemporary forms of magic. Although televised performance magic in the twenty-first century seems to construct its enchantments through reaffirming the values of its social, political, and cultural contexts rather than daring to imagine these differently, undertaking empirical audience research may reveal oppositional or resistant readings of these performances that suggest a refusal to fall under their spells.

With these reflections on the insights that researching audience engagement could bring to an academic understanding of performance magic, it remains to perform another shift in time to return to the discussion that opened this thesis, of P. C. Sorcar's televised Panorama version of 'the Sawing'. Looking back on this event, one can imagine that had the effect proceeded unconstrained by the demands of live television, viewers would have witnessed Dipty Dey revived, her body restored to wholeness. The BBC's phone operators and British print media circulated the message that Dey was unharmed, and that Sorcar's 'Sawing' really had been an illusion. Her dismemberment and renewal would be staged on many more nights across a multitude of stages, buoyed by the publicity of this apparent accident. An alternative imagining therefore seems irresistible: was this an accident at all, or was it a tactic on the part of the master magician? Was Sorcar an incompetent victim of the televisual apparatus, or did he time the effect precisely in order to build an audience through notoriety? Television may be a box of tricks of which even magicians can fall afoul, but it may also be a box of tricks is that is used by magicians to raise uncertainties that persist, realities that delude, and illusions that delight.

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Appendix. The Luke Jermay Lecture.

The following is a transcript created by the author from a DVD of *The Luke Jermay Lecture*, distributed by International Magic.

A, B and C are seated, facing the spectators. Jermay stands behind them, also facing the audience.

...

Jermay snaps his fingers. He leans between the chairs and turns his head left and right, checking A and B's eyes are closed.

Good.

Jermay crosses stage left, next to C, and taps him on the shoulder.

If you just felt me tap you on the shoulder, I'd like you to think of two simple images. Bearing in mind that for me, with my artistic ability, a heart and a star is very complicated. I'm going for like a square. Don't necessarily think of that, but think of one simple image and actually lock it in your mind and visualize it in front of you, as if you're seeing it on a big screen. *Pause.* Good.

Jermay crosses downstage right, back behind B, tapping him on the shoulder as he goes, and pauses upstage right.

If you just felt me tap you, I'd like you to think of a name, a name that you say every day, a name that has personal relevance to you. And just concentrate on how that name sounds, sound it out in your own mind, as if you're going to say it out loud. But don't give anything away just yet.

Jermay crosses downstage left, behind the chairs, tapping A on the shoulder as he goes, pausing upstage left.

And last but not least, if you just felt me tap you, I'd like you to think of a date, a date that again has some personal relevance. Could be a birthday, an anniversary, perhaps the year that *Back to the Future* came out. Whatever's important to you. Lock that in your mind. *(Turning to audience)* 1985, by the way. Great film. Good year. *(Turning back to face A, B and C)* Lock that in your mind for me right now. *(Pause)* Going to give you a couple of seconds, all three of you, just to lock those

separate thoughts in your mind. And you can open up your eyes whenever you like. *(Pause)*
Perfect.

Jermy crosses to C, B, and A in turn.

You have a thought in your mind right now? *(C nods)* You have something in mind right now? *(B nods)* And something in mind right now? *(A nods)*

Jermy arrives upstage right, addressing A, B and C.

There are a couple of things I want to clarify for everyone. One, I haven't come up to you beforehand and asked you, I don't know, to write anything down, or say anything to me, I didn't ask you anything on the way up? *(A, B and C shake their heads)* It was a free choice, correct? *(A, B and C nod)*

(To A) So what I'd like you to do is to stand up *(A stands)* and put your hand on my shoulder *(A does so)*. Good. *(Jermy pauses, turned towards the participants, his eyes cast down, shifting his weight between his feet, moves his fingers as if he is counting)* That's odd, but... Okay. Stay standing. *(He crosses to C)* Sir, stand up. Put your hand on my shoulder. *(C does so)* Just relax. *(Pause, Jermy faces the audience, shifts from foot to foot, looking stage right)* Visualize it out here, in front of you, again. See it as an image. A strong image in front of you. I might be slightly hazy on one of them. *(Slight pause)* But I think it's alright. Okay, yeah that's fine. I think I might have got one of them wrong. *(Jermy crosses to B)* Stand up for me, sir. Put your hand on my shoulder *(B complies)* Take a deep breath in. *(Jermy faces the audience, frowns, shifts, looking slight stage left)* You're tough. Scientist? *(B nods and smiles. Jermy pumps his fist, smiles, pauses)* Okay. Stay standing.

Jermy crosses stage left, addressing audience.

I think I have three thoughts in mind right now. The first thing I got was a circle and a triangle. The second thing I got was the name Laura. And the last thing was the date 1985. *(To C)* Sir, if I got your thought, sit down. *(C sits)* That's one out of three. In scientific circles, that would be considered highly significant. *(To B)* Sir, if I said your thought, sit down. *(B sits)* Two out of three. In scientific circles, that would be considered bordering on a miracle. *(To A)* Sir, if you heard your thought, sit down. *(A remains standing)* No? *(A shakes his head)* Two out of three. Bordering on a miracle. *(Jermy crosses to C and B, places his hand on their shoulders in turn)* You can take a seat, you can take a seat, thanks for your help. *(B and exit the stage)*

Jermy crosses extreme stage left, picks up a piece of paper, addresses A.

You're more of a challenge. Let's do this. Do you have a pen on you? *(A takes a pen out of his jacket pocket, hands it to Jermy)* Perfect. Let's start all over again. Stand here.

Jermy positions A, guides him slightly upstage, stands facing him so the two are in profile to the audience, maintains eye contact.

Relax. Take a deep breath in for me. And let it out. *(A complies)* Clear your mind. *(Jermy takes a step back)* You can stick to the thought you had before, or you can change it. Get any date in your mind for me now. Just think of a date. It could be any date that has relevance, or it could be a random one. But stick with that in your mind.

Pause. Jermy writes on the paper, then appears to scribble it out, looks at A, writes again, places the pen on the nearest chair, re-establishes eye contact.

Okay. I think I have your date. I think so. Maybe not. I think so. *(Steps towards A)* If, on this paper, it says your date, I want you to clap me *(Moves right hand to high-five position)*. If it doesn't, slap me *(Points to his right cheek)*

A laughs, winds up for the punch. Jermy steps back and forth, laughing nervously.

Okay, just release some of the anger.

Jermy steps back towards A, holding out the paper, holds his hand up to be high-fived. A looks at the paper, high-fives him.

Give him a round of applause, thanks for your help, take a seat.

Applause.

End of transcript.

From a spectator's perspective, it seems that Jermy has asked three participants to concentrate on a different, secret thought, and through some concealed method, has perceived what these thoughts are. In the lecture, Jermy goes on to explain that, in fact, he makes sure to 'tap' participants A and B under the cover of leaning forward to check their eyes are closed, prior to his request, 'If you just felt me tap you on the shoulder, I'd like you to think of two simple images'. From this point onwards in the effect, the perceived realities of the spectators and the participants onstage begin to diverge. A, B, and C all individually understand that they, but not

the others, are being asked to think of two simple images that are not a square, but are like a square. This is explained as classic psychological force that pushes participants to think of a circle and a triangle. The following two taps on the shoulders of A and B are feints, so that in fact nobody on the stage understands that they are being asked to think of a date or a name. When Jermy goes on to name his predictions, therefore, the other participants all assume that the date and name belong to the others, and take their seat when called upon to do so. That is, except for A, who- perhaps mischievously anticipating the force and its purpose- has thought of a different pair of shapes, and thereby risks disrupting the effect. Despite this, Jermy does not lose his poise, but continues with the effect by placing all the focus on predicting A's date, which he appears to do correctly. Perhaps the only discernible clue that he has not planned this aspect of the routine is that he does not have a pen ready himself, but asks to borrow one from A. As Jermy explains, this is achieved through an almost infuriatingly simple device, writing the words 'Your date' on the paper so that A has no choice but to high five him and be ushered swiftly back to his seat before he can disrupt the effect any further.